ANDORRA

ISABELLE SANDY

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"I SHALL NEVER MARRY YOU!"

ANDORRA

A Novel

By

ISABELLE SANDY

Translated from the French by

MATHILDE MONNIER

AND

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With Illustrations

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ANDORRA

I

SUSPENSE

THE wind is wailing like a basketful of cats," said Concepcion Asnurri, the youngest daughter of a youngest son of Andorra, and therefore poorest of the poor.

The others nodded their heads. That evening of anguish and suspense there were gathered in the great kitchen of la Solana the old master, Anton Xiriball himself, Joan, his only son, all save one of Joan's family, and the girl cigar-maker, Concepcion. Nyerro, child of Joan's first marriage and eldest of his sons, was a weakly, wall-eyed youth of twenty-five. He was also called "le Conco," but this name, which is reserved for the unmarried son who remains under his father's roof, was given him somewhat prematurely, for the "héreu" or heir of the Xiriballs had not yet

been legally designated and was as likely to be Nyerro as one of the sons of Joan's second marriage. He had passed the previous night and a part of the day hunting izards on the heights. Tired out, he dozed in his chair, his face expressionless, his hands hanging down limp. Angelo, his twelve-year-old half-brother, teased his dog on the sly.

Near Conchita, as Concepcion was generally called, sat Maria, the wife of Joan and the slave of them all. As she darned the stockings she breathed a sigh from time to time. Now and then she cast sly, quick glances toward the men, who remained impassive. A question kept rising to her lips, but fear prevented her from asking it.

"Conchita," she begged in a low voice, "supposing you ask him. Do you think he has any idea why Cisquo is so late? It makes him angry to see that I am anxious. I dare not say anything more to him . . ."

The girl raised her eyes. They said no.

"You are young and beautiful," Maria went on. "That always counts with men.

They'll answer you. They are uneasy, too. I can see that! My Cisquo should have been here fully twenty hours ago!"

"Yes, twenty hours ago," sighed Conchita, with dreamy eyes.

It was a joy to see her work. Unfolding, with a single turn of her finger, the wide, fermented, and fragrant leaf of tobacco, she rolled it around bits of waste and fastened it with flour paste, then with a sharp blade she cut off one end of the cigar, leaving the other pointed like the tip of a paper cone.

"That makes three hundred!" said the girl.

The men cast a friendly glance upon her, for she was gentle and beautiful, dark, it is true, but so are the virgins who for a thousand years have reigned over the altars of Andorra. And young men, attracted by the fragrance of her youth, followed her, but discreetly, with the reserve which befits Andorran custom.

Hence the men in this room looked upon her in friendly fashion; but the mother of

him who had been absent for three days murmured resentfully:

"You know how to hide your feelings. You don't seem to be thinking of him and yet . . ."

"Yes," the girl confessed, blushing, bending over her task.

Suddenly she cried out:

"Some one is coming!"

Her black eyes glowed as they gazed steadily at the door, which shook with the wind. Now it pushed it in, now out. The door vibrated, groaned, and seemed to struggle against a living being.

In the midst of this tumult no one but the cigar-maker had detected the muffled sound of a step. Some sense sharper than that of hearing must have spoken within her. The wind caged in the chimney was howling like all the beasts God ever created. Beneath the door invisible reptiles seemed to be hissing.

But Conchita the cigar-maker loved. The song of all mankind rose within her humble heart. Deprived of her mother at

the age of three, beaten ever since by a father who was a confirmed drinker of absinthe, and by a brother with a violent temper, she was indeed poorest of the poor. Often scorned, she had yet received the magnificent offering of a young love.

Let those who are perfect cast the first stone! Conchita loved. But who could know her secret, except the deep ravine screened with boxwood, which had sheltered her love, fresh as the bilberries of the wood. There the water lies like a green mirror in the blue granite, and however hard the couch of stone, soft were the caresses of the seemly Cisquo.

Once, only once, Conchita had innocently harkened to the young man's call. Once only, an eternity . . .

The tobacco was in flower under the August sun, and every one knows what an intoxicating perfume floats about the young men and women busied in cutting the buds. Drunk with it, they no longer measure their words, they are the playthings of an unknown god. And Conchita was humbled in

her soul, which was, indeed, purer than her flesh. She still went up and down the steep paths with her companions. Her words were serious and her eyes prudent when she met the mule-drivers, for the daughters of Andorra wear their honor upon their eyelids. Together with the devout and virginal hands of the others, the hands of Conchita gathered wild flowers and strewed them on the road when they passed a gilded, wide-eyed madonna set within her niche.

"Santa Madona, what were you looking at so fixedly?" Was it the guilty flesh or the still faithful and artless soul of Concepcion Asnurri?

The *Ave* fell thick and fast from the lips of the cigar-maker. It seemed as though her deep eyes, looking into those of the Madonna, implored forgiveness.

She loved, she loved! Therefore sorrow was near. Even in this remote region women know instinctively that death preys upon passion.

There in the kitchen of la Solana old

Xiriball motioned to Conchita, who went toward the door. Cautiously she leaned against the ancient oak panel that an invisible power was pushing toward her. She opened it halfway. A girl in black appeared.

Her hair was blown by the tempest. She held between her teeth a corner of the red kerchief which was slipping off her head. And in her hands she was carrying high a large box carefully locked.

"The *Sagrada Familla!*" exclaimed Angelo, bounding toward the newcomer, for everything was play to his twelve years.

A curt word from his father called him back to the respect due this pious custom sanctioned by the faith of their forefathers.

Silently Maria Xiriball rose and took possession of the girl's burden. She set it on a chest adorned with naïve and primitive carvings. When she opened the two little doors, the Holy Family appeared smiling, with its violet Saint Joseph, its blue Virgin, and its rose-colored Jesus.

"I had forgotten it was our turn, Con-

chita!" murmured the mother of Cisquo. "Perhaps it will bring us good luck . . ."

The cigar-maker crossed herself fervently and the men looked on in silent satisfaction, for one of the oldest rites of Andorran homes was being performed by the women of the family.

Until the following evening, the holy group would stay at the Xiriballs', then it would be carried to a neighbor's, and a month later it would once more return to bring honor upon their house.

Somewhat awkward and shy because the Xiriballs had not asked her to sit down, the newcomer exchanged a few words with Conchita, then disappeared behind the rattling door.

Above the noise of the wind, the rapping of a stick was heard on the kitchen ceiling. With compressed lips and stubborn looks Maria pretended not to notice it. But old Xiriball said in a tone of command:

"She is calling you. Don't you hear her?"

"I know what she wants," grumbled Maria.

She had no liking for her mother-in-law. The woman had been bedridden for seven years, and never had given a kind thought or a word of thanks to Maria whom she forced to wait upon her. Moreover, old Lola invariably took the side of the men against her. Since that was the custom, how could the poor creature have done otherwise? Upon whom, if not upon their daughters-in-law, could the old women, they who had been servants all their lives, pour out their rancor?

Maria carried the Holy Family up to the room of the devout invalid. Pale and emaciated, Lola sat up in bed moaning.

"Put it nearer on this table," she implored.

But Maria must have been deafened by the wind, for she set the little group down on a chest, lit a watch-light before the holy images, and disappeared. The grandmother called after her in vain:

"And Cisquo? Where is Cisquo? Has he fallen to his death on the rocks? Have the wolves devoured him? Where is Cisquo?"

Maria shrugged her shoulders. She knew only too well that Lola loved no one but Nyerro, Nyerro the simple-minded, whom she wished to make the héreu of the Xiriball. They would see! For her son who was her pride and Joan's pride, for the handsome Cisquo, Maria would fight inch by inch . . .

Toward eleven o'clock, as Conchita, pale with anxiety, rose to go home, men's voices were heard without.

"May we come in, Xiriball?"

The old master himself rose to open the door. Maria and Conchita exchanged looks of anguish.

"Buenos tardes!"

"Buenos tardes, carabineers!"

The two Xiriballs welcomed their guests with the noble dignity of their ancient and hospitable race. For the homes of Andorra, merciless to younger sons and to the guilty, are gentle and kind to travellers.

"Carabineers!" repeated the delighted Angelo. The three men smiled as they wiped their eyes which the wind had filled

with tears. They were Spanish carabineers on duty at the frontier, small dark men clothed in gray-green piped with red, with caps of patent leather.

The Xiriballs were on friendly terms with the oldest of the three. They never went to Spain without stopping to converse with him while other customs officers made a summary examination of their load. As their guns came into view above their shoulders, Xiriball remarked:

"Oho! Do you forget our traditions? You ought to have disarmed when you crossed into Andorra."

The oldest carabineer replied, smiling:

"Where could we have left our guns at this hour of the night? The Casa de la Vall is inhabited only by rats. And here in this village every one is sound asleep; you go to bed with the chickens!"

Then they all laughed, except Conchita and Maria. They could not take their eyes off these men whose duty it was to pursue smugglers. To be sure, encounters were rare, and for the last thirty years not a

single man from Andorra had fallen under the bullets of the carabineers. But once would suffice — and Cisquo was impulsive.

Why had he set out? Nobody had asked him to go! Although the Xiriballs, by reason of poor crops, of grave maladies among their cattle, and accidents in the mountains decimating the mules, had lost their old-time prosperity as squires, they were not yet reduced to this risky pursuit. Old Xiriball in particular disapproved of his grandson's undertaking it, yet he rejoiced to see him bring home a little money. He did not disapprove because the smuggler's trade seemed to him dishonest (how could Andorra dispose of its products without smuggling?); but because this trade, practiced on so small a scale, was reserved for the poor. If it were only a real expedition with a chief, twenty experienced men, all well equipped and with good backing — that would be worthy of the Xiriballs!

At this point a digression seems necessary. There is a great deal of talk about Andorran smugglers; the truth of the mat-

ter is that any people under the same geographical and economic conditions would not hesitate to practice smuggling. Andorra has no customs. "The country, therefore, serves as a free storehouse between the two cordons of French and Spanish customs for the products of both nations," rightly observes an historian, writing of Andorra.

"So the merchandise of the two neighboring countries accumulates in the valleys and waits the first opportunity to cross the opposite frontier fraudulently. As regards imports and exports, perfect harmony has not always reigned between Andorra and her two neighbors. In 1881 France had forbidden all importation, all transit, and all exportation by way of the frontiers of the Republic of Andorra."

Century-old rights of franchise are still granted to the Andorrans that put at a disadvantage the French producers of the adjacent departments, Ariège and Pyrénées Orientales. A third of all Andorran cattle may enter France free of duty. It is said

that when the last census was taken this herd of cattle appeared to be incredibly large . . . a slanderous tale, perhaps. The Andorran is naturally led to smuggle, and it is very difficult to enforce the law. For instance, some Andorran pastures are rented to Spanish and French communes. Among them Siguër and Hospitalet in Ariège. How is it possible to keep track of cattle which, under the pretext of rented pastures, are continually crossing the frontier? Andorrans and French exchange herds in these wide neutral stretches. It is plain that fraud and smuggling are due to a time-honored state of affairs and could not have failed to become a part of Andorran custom.

Far from being fierce and bloodthirsty, the smugglers are good honest peasants who earn a spare livelihood. The writer of this book had as a guide in Andorra a mule-driver forty or fifty years old, with a fine, gentle face. This is how he explained the evident fatigue of his mules: "You see they went to Spain yesterday on a smuggling

expedition. They must go back to-morrow. We have to live and I am poor . . ."

So the Xiriballs found fault with Cisquo, without seriously objecting to the lucrative undertakings. Cigars and tobacco went into Spain; absinthe came out of it.

Upon his return Cisquo used briefly to relate his adventure as he emptied his purse into his grandfather's hand; the carabineers had been very considerate; on the way they had been able to kill and eat two partridges. Waiting for nightfall, they had played cards on a mountain-top, surrounded by half-wild bulls. Were such ordinary doings as this worth relating?

Without permitting himself to ask the carabineers why they had come at so late an hour, old Xiriball ordered his daughter-in-law to serve them rancio.

"Conchita," said Maria as she waited on them, "go home, or your father will be sure to beat you. If anything happens, I'll come and tell you. Go, my child."

Conchita picked up her cigars in her apron, putting the tobacco leaves in a little

bag, and her sorrowful beauty vanished from before the admiring eyes of the carabineers. If they felt any regret they gave no sign. No one of them even asked her father's name.

When they had refreshed themselves and found their steaming clothes to be almost dry, the carabineers began to speak more freely.

"Molès is the one who induced us to come," confessed the eldest. "He wanted to come to-night. Why? That is his secret. We seized the opportunity to buy some cigars."

The men smiled, for the carabineers getting tobacco over the border was a current joke. He who was called Molès did not hesitate to admit it. "We were up all last night. For we had been warned that twenty smugglers were trying to get through with tobacco, twenty-five kilos apiece. That is enough to be worth while!"

"Indeed" said old Xiriball, while his son contented himself with a questioning glance. Nyerro and even the younger boy

affected indifference. But the mother of Cisquo, noticing how her hands were trembling, went and sat by the hearth, her whole heart in her staring eyes. The carabineer went on:

"Ugly customers these men were. Caramba! They fired at us. Nothing like that has happened for a long time."

"You don't say so!" murmured Joan Xiriball, looking at his father.

"If you don't believe it, you have only to look at the bullet hole in Molès's coat. He had a narrow escape. All the same, such things ought not to happen. Law is law; every man does his duty as best he can, the smuggler smuggles and we run him down, but that is no reason for shooting, caraï! Ugly customers, I tell you. We shan't spare them the next time."

Suddenly Maria took a step toward the men. Her husband and old Xiriball gave her a severe look. Then, to explain her attitude, she said in a broken voice:

"Is there enough rancio?"

She said anything that came to her mind,

for she had no thought but for her Cisquo. No one answered and she remained standing behind the carabineers. She was very humble and yet so threatening that the old master, uneasy, asked the question that was on her lips. Her tone would have betrayed her feeling.

"Did you fire back? What became of the men?"

"We fired into the air, because our chief told us to. But we pursued the brigands for some distance . . ."

He stopped, for a distressed voice was asking:

"In the air? Are you sure? You were going up hill and it was dark. Even if you did fire into the air . . . Are you certain no one was wounded?"

Astonished, the carabineers turned toward this woman who dared to take part in a conversation between men. A flash of anger darkened old Xiriball's eyes, and Joan said sharply:

"Don't sit up any longer, Maria. We don't need you. What are you standing there for?"

He added, encouraged by his father:

"She is worried because our Cisquo went to la Séo to sell a mule and hasn't gotten back."

"There is nothing to worry about in that!" remarked one of the carabineers, rising.

The others followed his example, saying reassuringly:

"You don't need to worry. There are handsome girls in la Séo and young Xiriball is twenty."

They spoke more freely now that Conchita was gone. Maria withdrew sighing. At forty she already looked like an old woman . . .

"Are you asleep?" she asked Lola. "You would better be praying, for the carabineers fired at them!"

She was suffering so much that she wanted to make some one else suffer, so she maliciously exaggerated the danger Cisquo was in.

"Santa Madona," moaned Lola. As Maria stood at the foot of the bed slowly undressing in the dim light of the night

lamp, she seemed a ghost from out a nightmare. Leaning on her elbow, old Lola looked and listened.

"And you know they say that Cisquo may have stopped at la Séo at that bad . . ."

"Don't say that! Don't say that!" cried the old woman. She crossed herself and spat on the floor.

In a torrent of words, full of rancor and passion, the mother made it clear that she preferred anything rather than death — yes, anything rather than suffering for her Cisquo. Her Cisquo whom Lola did not love, for Lola preferred Nyerro. Had she ever even attempted to induce Joan to curb the boy's spirit of adventure?

After all, if anything should happen, it would be his grandmother's fault. If only Cisquo came back, then they would see. What would they see? What new reign in their household was the Xiriball's humble servant prophesying?

She must be mad.

Lola stopped her ears and mumbled her *Ave.*

Wrapped about in an old shawl, Maria went toward the window. The dawn of the moon was whitening the green panes. The smooth corners of the two stone benches set in the thickness of the wall were shining dimly. Slowly the whiteness spread. One whole bench and a narrow strip of the floor were powdered with light. The full moor was rising as heavily as a wounded flamingo, behind the black hydra heads of the mountains.

Andorran nights, august, solemn, imperial, that for ten centuries have not fallen upon the misery of a single battle-field; nights that the jagged lines of the mountain-tops build into cathedrals; nights singing with the torrents; nights whose majestic silence is broken only by the cautious step of wild beasts, the serenity of these nights lies like fleece upon the naked souls of unhappy men.

Cisquo's mother was growing somewhat calmer. Numbed by nervous fatigue, she was staring down at the silver course of the Valira at the very bottom of the abrupt

slope on which la Solana stood. Then her eyes wandered across to the steep uprising of the earth upon the rocky frame of the mountain.

Ink-black clouds raced across the moon with the swiftness of the wind, a succession of nights filled the landscape and the room with darkness. But often in this darkness snowy mountain-sides appeared like wind-filled sails upon the sea.

Maria Xiriball was thinking that after all the night was not so bad and that Cisquo and his companions could find their way home even if the carabineers did pursue them far from Andorra. They would be returning. Presently Cisquo would knock joyfully at the door.

Why didn't the men come upstairs? What did it all mean? Were they hopeful or in anguish? What did they expect from the black and white night? She cast a glance toward the sleeping Angelo and, shivering and half-dressed, went downstairs at one o'clock in the morning. An uncontrollable ground-swell of fear had

come over her again. She felt the need of seeing some face other than that of the old woman, resting and remote in the peace of her age.

The two Xiriballs were smoking in silence by the hearth.

"I hear the dogs barking," said the mother of Cisquo by way of an excuse.

"So do I," said Joan almost gently, for he was suffering.

He went toward the door which no longer shook, for the wind had gone down. Nyerro's dog barked in the courtyard. "It must be Cisquo," the mother murmured. "The dog will quiet down. He has a keen scent."

She stirred the fire and turned up the light, but Mourillo did not quiet down. By this time he was howling close to the door as if he were trying to keep Death from entering.

His nerves tense, old Anton went out and kicked the dog, who moaned and was still. And so in deep silence Death entered the house of Xiriball.

In the mean time Conchita was at home. She still worked; for her father had weighed her cigars — "You haven't done enough," he had said. "You must finish these before you go to bed!" She remained by her table, working and praying from the depths of her misery; not for herself, but for Cisquo and her love, for she was like all the naïve and passionate daughters of Spain who ask God to bless their love. Let those who are perfect cast the first stone! She was a poor motherless girl, beaten and scorned, and so beautiful that the men of Andorra, despite their rough and haughty ways with women, smiled as she passed by. What a sway Cisquo had over her with his all-conquering gentleness! But since she had come to realize her weakness, she had struggled against it and had striven to uplift her soul, dragged down by the power of the flesh. Strength came back to her with repentance.

If only Cisquo returned alive, she would sin no more. She would not rebel if he were to marry some rich pubilla, and she herself

would be content to sink back into oblivion. Born a servant by the hearth, she would die a servant, only too happy to earn her place in paradise.

"Conchita! Conchita!"

She listened, her heart in her mouth and her knees giving way beneath her.

"Conchita. It is I, Angelo Xiriball!"

She went toward the door, she ran, so strange was the child's voice at that hour of the night.

"Open the door, Conchita!"

But she opened only the window: did that not suffice to let misfortune in? So she opened the window and received full in the face the merciless blow of fate.

"Cisquo is dead! My big brother is dead! They have just brought him home. Mother is weeping and calling for you. Come!"

The tragic sprite clothed in moonlight disappeared. Conchita was alone with her shattered love, with her heavy, weary body. Everything whirled about her as it used to when as a little girl she danced in a ring with her playmates.

She looked around for some support. She found none and fell on the floor. But she hurt herself and the pain awakened her. With uncertain step she got a shawl and wrapped it about her.

"Haven't you gone to bed yet? Where are you going?" asked her father, opening his door part way.

"To the Xiriball's at la Solana. Cisquo is dead."

Trembling she cast an imploring glance at him.

"It's my place and not yours to go there. Since when are girls allowed to run about at this hour of the night? Go to bed." Then he went out and locked the door.

As for old Lola, she was weeping and vainly crying out in her great lonely chamber. She scented death, and, from the sudden clutching at her old heart, guessed the victim was Cisquo. Her daughter-in-law had cried out like a wounded animal. Then silence had fallen upon the house. Why did no one come up to see her?

She succeeded in getting out of bed. She

crawled toward a corner of the floor where there was a hole the size of a walnut. Through it she was wont to watch the life of the family and to keep track of everything her hated daughter-in-law did. But what was she going to see this night? The bloody face of Cisquo? The silent despair of the master of the house?

Moaning, Lola knelt down, sank on the floor and looked.

Santa Madona! Why do you let old women live so long? Is not your paradise more inhabitable for the humble than their own homes, and are not your angels gentler than the gentlest of those close to them?

From what she saw that night the old woman understood that she had, indeed, lived too long. The narrow opening brought out in relief the tragic group. She saw the petrified head of old Xiriball and a young hand, waxen, stiff, and bloody.

The mountain, which had mercilessly killed many another, had killed Cisquo in his turn. There he lay stretched on the table until he should find rest in the cold

ground. It was his hand she saw. She wept, wept, wept. Strange it was that this hardened old woman could have so many tears beneath her eyelids. She called to the others, for she wished to suffer with them and not alone, in the great dim room. No one answered. She rose and leaned against the wall, then like a slow gray phantom, crept toward the Santa Familla. For an instant she contemplated the holy group.

"O Lord, what dire misfortune have you brought to pass this evening? Instead of benediction, death has come in with the holy images. And you, Santa Madona, Mother of Sorrows, have you, too, abandoned your servant?"

Wrath straightened the frail body and with one breath she blew out the watch-light. The Santa Familla must no longer look upon this household.

Nor had Nyerro seen the dead. From the corner of the shed where he slept close to his mules he had heard the heavy steps of a procession. Then the cries of Maria and the

sudden running of Angelo. Seated on his straw mattress, his clenched hands over his mouth and his eyes vague, he seemed to dream.

It was hard for him to imagine, in the place of beautiful Cisquo, who was always favored for his strength and beauty, a Cisquo now stiff, pallid, and weaker than a reed. Indeed, he seemed to be dreaming. Then he went out and prowled about the house. His dog at his heels was sniffing as if he, too, were wondering about the fate of la Solana whose future master was dead. In the side of the house opposite the entrance, which stood on the almost perpendicular rock, was a square window behind an ancient grating. Nyerro ventured upon the rock followed by his dog, who whined with fear. Ten times the man barely escaped rolling to the bottom; ten times he saved himself by catching the rough edges of the rock, or the sparse bushes which grew upon it.

He finally reached the window. He had to clutch the grating, and to cling by the

strength of his arms, motionless. He saw him whom they had called — before his time, to be sure — the héreu of the Xiriballs, stiff and bloody like a Christ, near his tortured mother and men who spoke low.

The face of Nyerro, blue in the moonlight, tense because of his struggle to hold on, would have been frightful, indeed, seen from within. But no one thought of looking at Nyerro. The dead alone under his half-closed eyelids seemed to have a glance for him. He shuddered and returned to his shed, sat on his bed and twirled his thumbs. He muttered to himself, as if the sound of the words would help him grasp their meaning, "Cisquo is dead; the héreu is dead. There is only a child, a child and I. I the eldest. Father will no longer hesitate to name his heir at the first opportunity."

The dawn silvered the sky and rose upon the hope of the Conco. Outside his dog continued to howl uneasily, with closed eyes, a white glimmer upon his wet nose.

II

THE MYSTERY OF A MOONLIGHT NIGHT

CISQUO had to be undressed and his broken body washed. His mother and old Anton wished to perform this last rite, for Joan seemed deprived of his senses. Beside his cold, lifeless son he, too, had become a body of stone, immovable and cold. The others, busy with their own grief, did not look at him.

With bared heads, their faces drawn with fatigue and sorrow, the smugglers too kept watch over their comrade. They who were so light in the mountains appeared awkward and heavy as they rendered Anton Xiriball the small services he asked of them with a mere sign of the hand. Suddenly Joan came to life. His eyes fell upon his son's temple where he saw a little wound.

"The bullet hole," he said in a hollow voice. "A carabineer's bullet."

The contrabandists bent over the body.

Finally one of them, somewhat pale, said, shaking his head:

"The shot came from the left as we were fleeing and the carabineers were coming up on our right. . . . It was not the gun of a carabineer that killed Xiriball."

"What is more, they all fired in the air and after having been attacked first."

"What did you mean by firing on them?" burst out old Anton. "Madmen that you were. Since when do men of Andorra smuggle with the help of their guns?"

He had straightened up full of scorn and anger and looked down upon the smugglers, who protested indignantly.

"Not one of us fired!"

"We know our business!"

"I have been smuggling for the last twenty years and I have never fired a shot yet."

"Two shots were fired, I know not by whom, but not by us."

These rough faces breathed sincerity, and the two Xiriballs were convinced. They were plunged in silent meditation, their

eyes fixed upon Cisquo. Suddenly the mother cried out passionately:

"If it wasn't a carabineer who killed him, then it was an assassin!"

When she had completed the last rites, she seemed to come forth from a dream, and with all the violence of her mad sorrow sought to stir the disconsolate apathy of the men.

"Yes, it was an assassin!" answered Joan in a broken voice.

He, too, was awakening, while old Anton, crushed by this revelation following upon the events of the terrible night, fell upon a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Until this tragic moment, he had been the imperious master of his family. He had never allowed his son to exercise the least authority in the household. To be sure, he had, according to custom, granted him full possession of his lands and of la Solana the day he had signed in the presence of a notary the marriage-contract of Joan and Maria. But as a matter of fact he was still master, the Cap de Casa. He alone of the

family had cast a vote. He had not wanted to abdicate in favor of his son. No doubt he had been waiting for age to drive him to it. And the peaceful and taciturn Joan bent to his authority without rebellion.

In the light of the livid dawn, before his murdered grandson, Anton realized for the first time that he was an old man, timid and weak. He was perfectly silent and lent ear to the others.

Maria Xiriball exclaimed:

"The day is dawning. Run for the sheriff! Heaven grant he may find the assassin and that I may live to see the fiend die under the garrote. Run! Run!"

She was no longer in tears; she was acting and for the first time in her life commanding. Joan went out without answering. Two of the smugglers followed him.

The huge kitchen had filled with people. Women of the neighborhood revived the fire with crackling boxwood and prepared coffee for the men. They whispered and crossed themselves as they glanced at the corpse. The father of Conchita was also

there, as he was a near neighbor. Crouching at the corner of the hearth, little Angelo was crying gently.

As for Nyerro, no one had seen him yet. Early in the morning they had heard old Lola rap on the floor, clamoring for her breakfast; Maria Xiriball asked one of the women to take it up to her. The invalid had forgotten everything that had happened and her mind was wandering.

Then Joan returned with the sheriff, accompanied by the country doctor and the nunci, the sheriff's assistant. At their heels hurried a group of people eager to witness the strange ceremony which was about to take place. For it is seemly to act according to custom, a goddess immutable as a rock in the presence of the fleeting centuries.

The sheriff arrived in ceremonial garb, with gambetto and three-cornered felt hat. A clerk took his place at his left and on his right the nunci came forward with bared head. The sheriff bent over the immovable Cisquo and said to him in a loud voice:

"Mort, qui t'a mort?"

Her eyes grown great with her sorrow, the mother looked upon her Cisquo in the mad hope that this imposing display of justice would awaken him, that he would answer authority.

But Cisquo slept too sound a sleep. So the nunci repeated his question which a second time echoed in silence. Then, more insistent, as if impatient at encountering this deadly indifference, he cried out:

"Dead man, arise! Let justice be done!"

For the last time the mother hoped for a miracle, for the resurrection of her dead flesh. That is why words the nunci repeated in a low voice to the sheriff fell upon her heart, heavy as the stone rolled upon a tomb:

"Es mort qui no respon."

The ceremony was over. Following the authorities, the curious onlookers went away in silence. Only a few close friends remained with the Xiriballs. The men talked with the men of the family regarding the murder while the women busied themselves about the house.

AT THEIR HEELS HURRIED A GROUP OF PEOPLE
EAGER TO WITNESS THE STRANGE CEREMONY

shameless avowal of her love. The neighbors whispered as they looked at her, and Maria Xiriball said, terrified:

"You mustn't! You mustn't kiss the dead, Conchita! The dead bring death upon others."

"No harm can come to me from him," wailed the cigar-maker; "and what do I care if I die!"

She added, looking fixedly at Maria Xiriball:

"Why should I want to live? I am so weary that I long to rest near him. Does God frown upon such a wish? Will He even hear such a sinner as I?"

She had spoken these words in a low tone as though before the tribunal of God. And Maria, frightened, forgot her own grief for that of Conchita. She accompanied her to the very door, indulgent toward her sin. She herself had known love when she had married handsome Joan, so like Cisquo. But anxiety laid hold of her, and she said to the girl, looking straight in her eyes:

"The good God is kinder than men.

Whatever happens, I shall not abandon you. I know you are an honest girl at heart, and you haven't had any mother to look after you . . ."

The pale Conchita grew still paler and her lips quivered.

"What will happen to me now, Maria? Am I not at the end of my misery? May God forgive me . . . But there is water in the Valira for unhappy creatures like me!"

At this moment the village priest passed by the house, and, without seeming to have heard her last words, said to the cigar-maker:

"I need you at the church this afternoon, Concepcion. I shall expect you at four." His look was that of the shepherd following his lost sheep. Then he entered the house of Xiriball to bless the dead youth.

Cisquo was borne to the little cemetery, so narrow that the dead seem to quarrel over the earth and lie buried the one above the other even before time has done its work. Not a single tombstone. Not a flower. Two or three crosses. It was like a

meadow ploughed here and there by the work of moles.

All the inhabitants of Andorra were there except the mother of Cisquo whom custom forbade to attend the funeral: neither would custom have allowed her to be present at the young man's wedding. But what did that matter? This lifeless, cold body was no longer her Cisquo! If Maria understood the hopeless fascination these poor remains had for Conchita, she did not share it. An ardent believer, she thought only of the soul of the dead, and ordered masses.

Cisquo had not a flower, not a cross, but he received a strange visit. One evening at dusk an old woman who half opened the gate of the cemetery fled in terror: she avowed that a gray phantom wrapped in mist was stamping upon the grave of Cisquo Xiriball with diabolic fury. At the woman's cry it had vanished into thin air.

The whole village shrugged its shoulders at this fantastic tale. Only Conchita believed it and ran to the cemetery. The old woman had told the truth. Some one had

stamped upon the grave with great hob-nailed shoes.

This savored more of the wickedness of men than of demons. Therefore the cigar-maker went through the narrow village streets and kept repeating to all those she met:

"The murderer of Cisquo Xiriball has desecrated his grave. It is a disgrace that he has not yet been discovered."

An old grandmother replied:

"That's an idle tale, my child. Try to forget it, and take care of yourself, for you are very pale, and your face is sadly drawn. Take care of yourself, I say."

The eyes of the old woman gleamed beneath her white eyebrows like a brook under frost-covered grass.

That evening Conchita said:

"Maria, how shall I answer them?"

Maria Xiriball was preparing the evening meal. She added a dash of vinegar and a spoonful of honey to the slices of ham she was frying, according to the recipe for the "rostes al mel," a favorite dish in Andorra.

Before answering, she sighed, and groaned, for she was wont to look on the dark side of life. Being likewise very devout, she called upon Our Lady of Méritxell, the patron saint of Andorra, and finally replied:

"You are a poor motherless girl and that is the cause of all your misfortune. But I shall not abandon you. I have spoken to Joan about you."

"And what did he say?" stammered Conchita.

"He said in the tone you know so well: 'You women are mad! Conchita is suffering from dropsy, but she will recover.' He meant that he would spread this report far and wide for the sake of your honor. Now, let me talk to you like a mother. Honor is the greatest thing in the world. Don't admit anything. Carry your head high. You have been to confession, haven't you? Carry your head high, I tell you, and bide your time. Joan and I will not forsake you. He is good at heart. If it weren't for his parents, especially his mother . . ."

At this point Maria turned, and, complaining as usual, set four plates upon the table. A moment later she went out to call the men to dinner and walked home with Conchita.

Seated before his door, the father of Conchita, Bonaventure Asnurri, smoked his cigar. With half-closed eyes he looked at the two women, the one already heavy and slow in her movements, the other gentle and maternal. His features suddenly became tense. His hands trembling visibly, he rose and opened his mouth, as if vainly seeking words to express his wrath and to call down maledictions upon the head of his daughter.

He was short and ruddy, as thick-set as a mountaineer can be. His chin was bluish. His lower lip was heavy and drooped. A great smoker, a great drinker, lazy and yet violent, he was a man to be feared. Every one took pains not to quarrel with him. He seemed to be instinctively afraid of his own hot temper, and, whenever he could, he avoided anything that might

arouse it. There was no one more silent and more cunning than Bonaventure Asnurri.

Maria Xiriball stood somewhat in awe of him. But she knew she was under the protection of Joan. So she drew herself up courageously to defend Conchita, who had turned pale.

"Asnurri," she said, "your daughter is suffering from dropsy. Joan commented upon it this morning. Don't let her work too hard. I myself will look out for her. You understand?"

Did he understand? Conchita's sin was known, but no one had dared speak of it, and now the Xiriballs, who were honored by all, were going to lend their protection to the unhappy girl. Asnurri silently struggled against his anger and clenched his teeth. In fear and trembling Conchita served his dinner; then she set her kitchen in order.

As she was about to seek rest for her weary body, her father raised his hand, and said roughly: "Get at your evening's work."

She obeyed and he went out to sit with a neighbor.

It was not till she had finished the four hundredth cigar that she rose to go to bed. Such were her evenings after days of misery. But she did not allow herself to think of death since the priest, in his stern and paternal way, had made her swear to face her destiny.

III

THE FAMILY THREATENED

A LEGEND relates that Louis le Débonnaire, after having defeated the Moors in a place since called la Massana, uttered these inspired words:

"Wild valleys, I christen you 'Endor.' Soldiers, it is my will that a certain number of you settle in this place, that Andorra may know no other suzerainty than that of the Emperor, my father, and of my trusty knight, the Count of Urgel."

But history and science tell a different story. The name of Andor, An'thor, or An'dur, goes back to ancient times. From the prefix "and," the Italians and Spaniards have made their verb "andar," to walk.

The Andorrans, whom Pliny seems to designate under the name of "Andorrisoe," were probably a people living in the neighborhood of Cadiz, whence one fine day they disappeared to become a nomad tribe. Later they seem to have settled in the heart

of the Pyrenees and to have produced a race of shepherds. In face of the rapid changes the discoveries of science bring to pass in our Occidental civilization, Andorra stands immovable like a gigantic cliff rising from a tempestuous sea.

The laws of ancient Rome and the laws of the Middle Ages are still the basis of Andorran legislation, writ not in codes, but in the minds of all. The social unit is the family, with its Cap de Casa who alone has the right to vote. The father chooses his only heir and does what he can for the other sons; he makes priests of them or provides them with wives endowed with land. The younger son who remains unmarried is given the name of Conco and stays at home, where a place, anything but an enviable one, is assured to him.

These austere but wise customs prevent the further dividing of the land which the mountain measures out so parsimoniously to the sons of Andorra. There are consequently a few prosperous landowners, who form the aristocracy of this essentially dem-

ocratic country. "Everything for the people, but not by the people," seems to be the motto of the leaders of Andorra.

Up to the twelfth century, the history of this country remains vague. The Bishops of Urgel and the Counts of Foix fought over the suzerainty of the valleys. One of the best historians of Andorra has questioned the authenticity of a document of 802, recording the consecration of the cathedral of la Séo d'Urgel, but, according to this authority Charlemagne granted the Church of Urgel and its bishop, Possidonius, the right to collect tithes from the valleys.

What is certain, however, is that Andorra was conquered by Frankish soldiers in the eighth century. In 843 Charles the Bald gave to Siegfried, Count of Urgel, rights over the valleys, not as yet defined. The Lords of Urgel and the Counts of Cerdagne fought for the possession of Andorra. It was thanks to marriages which took place in the thirteenth century that the House of Foix inherited the rights of the Houses of Castelbon and of Caboët over

Andorra. At the same time, and as a result, Andorra became the vassal of the Bishop of Urgel. Later the bishop was conquered in battle.

At the suggestion of the King of Aragon and of the Bishop of Valencia an agreement known as the "Paréages" was signed in 1278. This pact, which constitutes the real foundation of the history of the valleys, was confirmed in 1282 by a bull of Pope Martin IV.

We leave to the learned commentators of the Paréages the task of going into the manifold details of it and of drawing conclusions.

For a clear understanding of this story it suffices to say that to-day the Bishop of Urgel and the French Republic, which has inherited the rights transmitted to Henry the Fourth by the House of Foix, are co-suzerains of Andorra. Andorra is perhaps the only country in the world where there has been no fighting for nearly seven hundred years.

This is why complete security, born of the

institutions and the geographic situation of the country, sheds its light upon Andorran homes. The houses are built to last for centuries. The walls of some peasant dwellings are hundreds of years old and massive as those of mediæval castles. There are no forts, no military ruins on the summits of the rocky hills which overlook the valleys, but only Romanesque chapels left sometimes to the care of hermits who live on charity. The mule-drivers who pass by toss pennies through the locked gratings of these solitary chapels and the pious women of Andorra kneel down to pray.

Since the time of the Paréages, faithful Andorra has paid a comparatively small yearly tribute to France. In 1793, the envoys of the General Council presented themselves at Foix to pay the Quistia. The French authorities declined to take it, alleging that feudal ground-rent had been abolished with feudalism. The Andorrans patiently awaited the end of the storm, then they begged France to renew the old tradition. This was done in 1806.

France is represented by one magistrate, the Bishop of Urgel by another: their power is exclusively juridical. The highest authority is held by "The General Council of the Valleys" with an elected membership.

Andorra includes six communes or parishes, Canillo, Encamp, Ordino, la Massana, Andorra (also called Andorra-the-Old), and San Julia, numbering in all about six thousand inhabitants. Each parish is governed by a Parish Council or Comu.

Every morning this Comu sends the poor and the aged their portion of soup and bread, a wonderful example of solidarity which many a large nation might well follow. Since forests and pastures are owned in common, they give rise to no disputes. These customs alone are sufficient evidence of the gentleness and kindness of the people. Coming from out the dim past and beneath a somewhat rustic exterior, lie qualities usually associated with the highest type of civilization.

While Conchita, tragically alone, contin-

ually talked with Maria Xiriball of the murder of Cisquo, for she could think of nothing else, the green breath of spring was blowing over the meadows and the woods.

The landscape was changing, but in details only, for, like those of a gigantic temple, its immovable outlines and masses remained essentially the same, haughty and austere, despite the fresh charm of the wild iris.

Andorra-the-Old, at an altitude of over a thousand metres, piles up its houses of russet stone with their black roofs at the foot of the Puig d'Anclar, whose summit is a strange mountain, itself nearly three thousand metres high. It seems as though the Andorran soil, ashamed of having lain for a moment upon the banks of the calmed Valira, had started up more furiously than before to storm the imperial sky, so furiously that the garment of earth had slipped from the thin shoulders of the mountain leaving it bare and hard. Beneath its sharp peaks falls one of those petrified cataracts of blu-

ish stone called "tartère" in Andorra, where they are not infrequent.

At a height of a thousand metres, a wide-spreading leprosy seems to have eaten into the mountain. Corroded and decayed, it reveals its skeleton; here and there are greenish blotches of barren bushes; but not a single tree. Nothing wholesome could live upon this desolation, the very eagles fly over it quickly and the izards do not venture there.

When the low clouds lie in tatters upon the mountains, this monstrosity comes to life in its floating shroud of mist; the tartère with its over-lapping flat stones seems like an immense scaly body from which rise the hydra heads of sharp summits, ominous and watchful.

Even at the soft touch of spring, or in the early light of dawn, the Puig d'Anclar is mysterious and grave; in a storm it is sinister. The dirge of the bells, the thundering of the waters, seem to be its voice. It has a strange life of its own. One is tempted to attribute to it, as to a living being, every sound, everything that rustles, everything

that threatens or alarms, the hissing of the tempest, the treachery of the lightning, the terror of the thunder.

The first men who made their way into these valleys once covered with forests must have seen a sombre spirit in this mountain, wounded, bleeding, and bare. The Celts must have bowed down before it, imploring its favor. Andorra chose to lie at its feet.

At the southern end of the little capital of Andorra rose la Solana, its main entrance on a level with the narrow street. High above the valley, the back of the house overhung a steep cliff. Beneath its old roof, the quiet life of former days had given way to drama and mystery. Peace-loving, as most Andorrans are, the Xiriballs would perhaps have allowed their tragedy to lapse into oblivion.

But Conchita had no mercy upon Maria. Every evening the two held long and secret conversations, sitting near the deep-set window, while Nyerro took his father's orders for the work of the morrow.

Nyerro was changing, and for the better. He had become more active and less taci-

turn. It seemed as if he had vowed to take the place of Cisquo by assuming his task. Conchita believed that this supposedly simple-minded youth was shrewder than people realized and that he hoped to be chosen héreu.

"If he finds a wife," whispered the cigar-maker to Maria, "Joan Xiriball cannot help making over to him la Solana and all the land, as is customary. What a pity Angelo is so young! Otherwise he would be the héreu."

"He is almost fourteen," sighed Maria, "but so far as good sense goes he is not yet twelve. He never has a serious thought. He thinks of nothing but play."

Urged on by Conchita, Maria induced Joan to entrust the child to the schoolmaster of Escaldes who had acquired a great reputation for knowledge and for kindness as well.

Strangely enough, Angelo proved to be an excellent pupil, although outside the classroom he was still one of the most mischievous boys in the village.

Old Anton was heard to observe: "What good will all this learning do him? He has no sense and he cares nothing for the land, whereas Nyerro does the work of two."

They were all aware that during the long, sleepless hours common to old age, Lola and Anton discussed the fate of la Solana and were coming to favor Nyerro more and more.

One Saturday after school the master of Escaldes set out for Andorra. Angelo had made such progress during the six months he had been teaching him that he felt it his duty to report to the Xiriballs. He was walking slowly, for the distance was short; scarcely fifteen hundred metres. The evening wind rose and beat its wings, powerful as those of a soaring eagle. The august silence of night was already deadening the air above the eternal noise of the waters. The men were returning from the fields, their shovels on their shoulders and red barettinas on their heads. The schoolmaster recognized Joan Xiriball among them.

"I was coming to see you," he said.

They talked together as they strolled along. The master's arms were crossed behind his back and Joan kept his shining shovel on his shoulder. At first they did not speak of what was close to their hearts, but of weather and crops. However it was not difficult for the master to turn the conversation to Angelo.

"Your son is very intelligent," he began. "If you wished, you could easily make a teacher or a priest of him . . ."

Joan shook his head without speaking. He was very proud of Angelo, but he found no way of expressing this new feeling.

"In any event," the teacher went on, "he would some day make a good master for la Solana, while the other . . . But of course that is no affair of mine," he concluded prudently, for Joan Xiriball was frowning.

Why should people meddle in his affairs? There was no haste. There was no reason why he should choose his heir now. A timid man at heart, grown still more irresolute under the tyrannical will of old Anton, he

suffered not a little from the continual nagging of his wife and mother.

Had not Maria gone so far as to say, "Your first wife was not an Andorran, and Nyerro is very like her. Do you think that he can take command here? How different if it were the little boy who is your living image."

And so it went on day after day.

Seeing that Joan was annoyed and, fearing that he would never again have so good an opportunity to speak to him, the schoolmaster ventured to allude to something he felt the Xiriballs should know.

"Are they on the track of the murderer?" he asked under his breath.

When Joan replied in the negative, he continued:

"Listen, Xiriball, I have my own opinion of that sad affair. You can take it for what it is worth. He who killed your Cisquo did not strike at him alone, but at the family of Xiriball. What he wanted was to kill your heir. Watch over Angelo. Don't let him go into the mountain alone. Your older son is

not in the same position. No one can be particularly jealous of him. I fear for Angelo who should, some day, be a man of importance; he will, at any rate, be a good father of a family, for learning does not keep a man from wielding the shovel. Don't forget that, Xiriball, and above all watch over Angelo!"

"He who killed Cisquo meant to strike at the family of Xiriball." These words echoed strangely in Joan's ears. He continued to hear them after the master had left him. Angelo ran to meet him and he bade him find his mother. Then he sat down beside the road, and rolled a cigarette.

Who in the wide world could hate the Xiriballs to the point of committing murder? Was not the master wrong? Had it not been rather the vengeance of a lover? But no one had known of the affair between Cisquo and Conchita. A discreet investigation, conducted by the sheriff, had proved the innocence of the girl's father and brother. Moreover, the blameless life Con-

chita had led up to the time of her love for Cisquo precluded any suspicion of jealousy.

The Xiriballs were sociable, peace-loving, and highly respected; in the whole course of their lives they had had but one quarrel, and that a dispute of slight importance, with Bonaventure Asnurri. The cause of it was strange enough.

In Andorra land may be sold with power of redemption, "à la carta de dio." This custom allows the seller to buy back his property without further formality. Even after centuries have passed, his heirs may claim the retrocession of the land. Such had been the claim of Bonaventure Asnurri a few years before. The field in question was, when it was sold, rather unproductive, but had been greatly improved by generations of Xiriballs. Conchita's father wished to buy it back, but the Xiriballs had refused to sell. Asnurri had gone to court and had lost his case, because he had offered only a sum equal to that paid by the Xiriballs two centuries earlier. For a long time he laid all this up against his neighbors and would not

speak to them. It was Maria's friendship for the motherless Conchita that had brought the two families together again.

As he went over these facts, Joan came to feel more and more certain that Asnurri was not guilty. He was almost disappointed, so great was his desire to unmask the enemy of his race. With singular persistence, as night came on he went far back to the memories of his childhood like one who seeks a lost object in the most out-of-the-way drawers. He lived over the scene of terror in the course of which his father, angered by a mere trifle, had flung him violently against the corner of a chest.

Joan had cut his head badly and had fainted. His mother had bound up the wound, moaning the while, but she had never dared to reproach her husband with his cruelty. And the day the bandage was taken off, Joan found that he heard nothing through his right ear.

He carefully concealed this misfortune. For nothing on earth would he have had his father know how terrible his punishment

had been; but he grew taciturn and slow of understanding, and the look of his eyes became more intense as he strove to read the lips of those about him. He never did well in school. His father used to say: "Joan is not very intelligent."

He sometimes tried to call him from afar when they were cutting wood together in the mountains, but Joan could not hear. One day, when this angered his father, he ventured to say:

"I am sorry, but I cannot hear anything with my right ear."

He was nearly eighteen, and he had kept silence about it for nine years.

Anton expressed surprise and demanded an explanation.

"It has been so ever since I cut my head on the corner of the chest," replied his son.

After that old Anton never again called Joan from the solitary places where their flocks were pastured. Instead, he would go toward him, making his way over the loose rocks that moved beneath his feet like the back of a live animal, and, touching the

young man on the shoulder, he would give him a brief order.

Joan had long since forgiven his father; he admired him without daring to love him. He displayed an extreme humility in his presence. Although he had in his turn become master of la Solana, he had let the older man keep the reins. With his children he was gentle and never exercised his authority except to protect them from the brutality which had made his own childhood wretched. But with them the grandfather was always kind, sometimes even weak. He had shown particular fondness for Nyerro, the firstborn, and took a perverse pleasure in praising this child whom everybody else considered simple-minded. Joan's first marriage had been the work of old Anton. For the sake of a paltry dowry he had married him to a sickly Spanish girl, whose father was a drunkard. This robust mountaineer was convinced that the blood of his family could perform a miracle; whoever the mother might be, a Xiriball could have none but strong children. He therefore

went so far as to attribute all possible qualities to Nyerro rather than to admit that he had made a mistake. . . . The beauty and the vigor of Maria's children did not seem to interest him. It was only when he saw Cisquo lying dead that he betrayed his carefully concealed affection.

"Why," Joan kept saying to himself, "why was Cisquo killed rather than his elder brother? His grandfather's partiality was well known. . . . And why did the teacher tell me to keep careful watch of Angelo — no one but Angelo?"

He clenched his teeth and he clenched his fists with futile wrath. His race was threatened. Was the chain to which every Xiriball through the long centuries had added a link going to break? Would his house henceforth shelter none but old men until it came to shelter strangers?

Anger, hatred, grief, barked like a pack of dogs in this silent heart; never had Joan suffered as now, not even when they had brought Cisquo to him; for he had not even then conceived the idea that his race could

come to an end. Fathers and sons succeeding one another from the beginning of all time to the end of all time; Joan Xiriball could imagine no other form of glory or ambition. The wicked will of the criminal who had striven to interfere with this great law of the Xiriballs seemed to him impious, nothing less than diabolical. Indeed, the murderer should be exorcised and then shot without mercy.

When he returned to la Solana he said nothing to his father. It would be better to leave the old man in peace and to take upon himself the task of saving the Xiriballs.

The next day he went to see the sheriff, confided in him his new fear, and was astonished to find him silent and reticent.

"It is a delicate matter, Xiriball, a very delicate matter. We are not neglecting our duty. Time will tell. I am convinced that the guilty man will be caught in the course of our investigation as a rat is caught in a trap. But be patient; we must not arouse suspicion. It is, indeed, a delicate matter!"

IV

NYERRO AND ANGELO

EASTER approached and all the maidens of Andorra were weaving the ivy crowns they were to wear in the procession of Our Lady of Sorrows. Conchita had always helped, and the girls politely asked her to share in their work as in previous years. But Conchita had refused gently.

At daybreak the men went to the little Romanesque church, low and dark as a cellar, and brought out a heavy life-sized Christ, bending beneath their load. There, too, the daughters of sorrows went in quest of all the emblems of the Passion which they were to carry, — the crown of thorns, the lance, the miniature ladder, the sponge, and the heavy nails. Clad in long black robes and crowned with ivy, they joined the procession behind the little girls in white with their wreaths of flowers upon their heads; the crowd of faithful believers gathered slowly, spread out, and filled the winding

lanes after the manner of a swollen stream seeking its bed. As they went on, their horizon broadened. Roads running through fields, ancient lands at the same time serving and nourishing their homes, lands heavy with the ashes of their dead, reëchoed to the canticles of the living.

This persistent and regular recurrence of ancient rites, untouched by either war or revolution, may lull the creative faculties of the race, but it makes its natural fluctuations as lasting as the surging of the ocean and the winds.

Strange that there should still be in the heart of tumultuous Europe, whose agitation contemplative Asia observes and reflects upon through the slanting eyes of its yellow men, a race so stable, so well-ordered, so close to its dead as the Andorran race.

In the valleys of Andorra the bells ring back through the centuries; these devout processions of ivy-crowned maidens are the lovely links that bind innumerable generations.

After praying at the foot of a cross hewn from the granite by an artist of the Middle Ages, the cortège returned to the church where many tapers and lighted candelabra announced the Benediction. When it was over, the priest remained alone, and for a long time prayed in silence. On leaving the church he walked toward the farthest houses of the village. As if by chance, he passed the home of the Asnurri. Conchita, who was seated before the door preparing vegetables for the evening meal, greeted him gravely. He stopped, made sure the girl was alone, and said:

"May God help you, my child. I am praying for you. But do not forget that as priest of this town I must watch over the living and those who are to live as well. If in any way one of them is prevented from seeing the light of day, I can but hale the guilty person before the Corts. For no one has the right to destroy God's creatures."

"I have sworn . . ." stammered the cigar-maker, whose sorrowful brow was knitted in distress.

"I know, my child, but we are pitifully weak if we rely upon ourselves alone. Pray, pray without ceasing, and take courage."

"Buenos tardes!" he said suddenly, for he heard steps.

A little girl of whom Conchita was fond ran up.

She was singing one of those joyous and rhythmical songs, at once tender and mocking, the naïve words of which are scattered abroad at dusk or in the starry nights by the people of Spain. The little girl's song told a beautiful tale of love.

"Why aren't you singing, Conchita?" suddenly asked a mule-driver, as he rode up on his high mule all gay with red pompons. He was laughing, and in the gleam of his eyes the cigar-maker detected a hint of disrespect and familiarity. She said beneath her breath:

"Cisquo, my Cisquo, is this the way they are going to treat me? Am I to be despised merely because I loved you? Have I ever ceased to believe in God and to repent of my sins?"

As the mule-driver drew near, repeating, "Why aren't you singing as befits a pretty girl?" for the first time she sought shelter and protection in the memory of her dead, making, as it were, a shield of his tomb.

"My heart lies beneath the sod, Pépe, and none but crickets sing under the ground. Go your way, for night is falling and Canillo is far off."

The man went his way, and the little girl kept on singing close to Conchita as she helped her pare the fresh vegetables. It seemed as if the cigar-maker had chosen this light flute to give voice to her own passionate longing and her own sorrow.

A little later, Maria Xiriball appeared and offered to attend to Conchita's washing with her own, to spare her strength. She sat down and talked at length of the affairs of the Xiriballs which were taking a turn for the worse. Under the influence of old Lola, Anton was more and more favorably inclined to Nyerro. In his turn, he exerted pressure upon Joan. He continually set forth the good qualities of the elder son.

When bad weather prevented him from tilling the soil, was not Nyerro always to be seen saddling his mules to carry heavy loads over the mountain? A light eater, a moderate drinker, taciturn and sure-footed, was he not the best of mule-drivers as well as the best of farmers?

Maria had heard all this by listening at the keyhole. White with anger she said to Conchita:

"That Nyerro is slyer than even I have realized. I brought him up and yet I don't know him .... Every evening he goes upstairs to see his grandmother, and they talk in whispers. Ah, Conchita, I am indeed a wretched woman! My eldest lies murdered, my youngest is to be robbed of everything for this stupid creature! And what would become of me in a household ruled by Nyerro?"

"He shall not be the heir!" cried Conchita passionately. "Angelo must take his brother's place. Nyerro will have his mother's property. That is surely just!"

"You are right, my child. But what can

I do by myself? Who would have believed that this Nyerro, whom I have cared for from childhood, would one day be my enemy. Alas! Who would have believed it, indeed? Does he not show he is feeble-minded? It is a crying shame to make him master of la Solana. How can Joan prefer him to our little boy? The other day the poor child wanted to go into the forest to gather branches of boxwood for the church. His father forbade him in a tone that frightened him, so that he ran to me in terror. Conchita, what is going on at la Solana? I wonder if we are not all bewitched."

The girl's weary hands fell upon her knees, and with a far-away look in her eyes she murmured:

"I fear that Nyerro is at the bottom of it all. Nyerro is not simple-minded. He is malicious. Be on your guard, Maria!"

Henceforth Maria Xiriball was doubly careful; she kept close watch of Nyerro and old Lola upon whom he constantly show-

ered attentions. One evening while these two were chatting in the room above, Angelo's mother seized one of the child's copy-books, and, showing it to Joan and Anton, she said with pride:

"Look at this! Not a blot, not an erasure: and nothing but good marks!"

It was, as a matter of fact, a very respectable book for a small boy. The capitals were as perfectly rounded as vaults, and beneath them were lined up the well-disciplined crowd of small letters.

Joan and his father, both of whom read with some difficulty, appreciated the fine appearance of the book and showed their pleasure. Their great fingers, brown and hairy as the stems of ferns, turned the leaves on which the lamplight shone. Seated at the end of the table, his nose in a book, bursting with pride, young Angelo raised his eyes from time to time and smiled at his mother. No doubt he vaguely realized that this simple family lingered over his adolescent charm, as running waters seem to linger around green and flowery islands.

Maria Xiriball went to and fro almost unnoticed, putting away, in a high old chest, plates that shone very white against her black dress. She was careful to make no noise for fear of losing a single word the two masters of la Solana might pronounce.

But the shrewd old man merely declared:

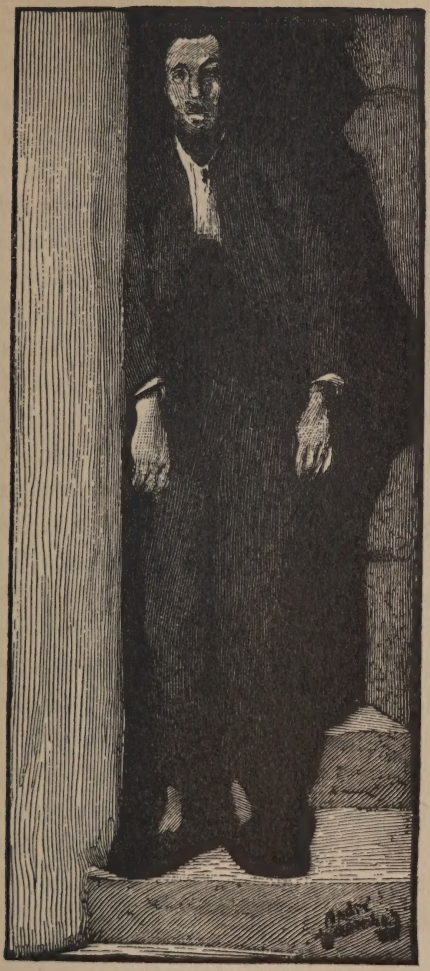
"You are growing very wise, Angelo! You have the making of a priest in you and we must send you to the seminary!"

"I, a priest! I!" exclaimed Angelo, with flashing eyes. "I want to till the arrayo of the Xiriballs and my arms are the strongest in the house!"

The men smiled. Red with indignation, his arms stretched out above the table, the boy proudly showed his muscles. His mother cast adoring eyes upon him, and said:

"Not only is he strong, but he is going to be a great scholar. And for all I know you will see a Xiriball a magistrate . . ."

She stopped short, realizing that there was some one behind her. Standing on the



STANDING ON THE BOTTOM STEP OF THE STAIRWAY
NYERRO WAS GLARING AT HIS BROTHER

bottom step of the stairway, Nyerro was glaring at his brother.

As the light of the lamp fell upon it from the side, his face appeared red, furrowed with deep gray shadows. His hands trembled. He seemed as much of a stranger to the Xiriballs as an uneasy wanderer appearing on their threshold to ask shelter for the night.

"Why don't you come nearer?" cried Maria. "What are you doing there?"

"Come here," said Joan. "Look at Angelo's copy-book. He is learning all manner of things and you don't even know how to write."

Nyerro advanced under the scrutinizing gaze of Maria. She looked upon him with newly opened eyes. The ambition of the older son, at first circumspect and timid, was becoming feverish and dangerous, perhaps, for Angelo.

Impulsively the boy held out a blank sheet of paper to Nyerro, saying:

"You try to write something, Nyerro!"

"He doesn't know how!" old Xiriball

acknowledged regretfully. "He wasn't good at his books. Leave him in peace. Don't tease him."

Whereupon Angelo started to take back the sheet of paper, but still silent, pale, and nervous, Nyerro sat down beside his brother, seized his pen, and with a slow, stiff hand wrote:

"I, too, know how to write!"

He signed Xiriball y Morra, which was his mother's name.

While Angelo, far from realizing the full significance of this event, burst into joyous exclamations, the two Xiriballs and Maria behind them leaned over in astonishment to look at Nyerro's writing.

"Who taught you?" asked the old man in a pleased tone. "They couldn't do anything with you at school."

"I taught myself."

"Lately?" asked his father.

This innocent question so disturbed Nyerro that he turned pale, and his hands, strange square hands with flat thumbs, reached out for the piece of paper.

"Yes, just lately. Not more than a month ago."

"That's what I thought," whispered Maria to her son. "He didn't want to be outdone by you. But he writes like a child of eight."

The conversation ended.

As he turned to go to bed, Nyerro approached the table quietly and with a swift turn of the hand seized the forgotten sheet. Then he fled. When he and his faithful dog were alone in the shed, he tore the written part of the paper in small bits, rolled them in a ball, and swallowed them. Then he burst out laughing, and to give further vent to his satisfaction he threw his dog a crust of stale bread.

In the mean time a silent little drama was taking place in old Lola's room. Having gone up noiselessly, Maria caught her mother-in-law crouching on the floor and spying upon the family through the hole in the corner. She came near uttering an exclamation of surprise, but controlled herself in time.

"So this is the invalid who cannot take a step," she thought, "and whose servant I have been for the last eight years! I will endure it no longer! My patience is at an end!"

The next day, while old Lola was still sleeping and the men were leaving for the fields, Maria drove a large cork into the hole and bore down upon it with all her weight. Then she left the old woman's daily breakfast and went about her washing with a contented heart. When she worked against Lola was she not working for her son?

Andorra has two well-kept public washing-places; the larger spreads its blue-green waters before the house of the Syndic, a huge white building, its façade naïvely decorated with ochre-colored religious emblems.

The front door of this house opens into a great bare vestibule, with floor of hard trodden earth and whitewashed walls. At the farther end stands the staircase which leads to the second story.

On the second floor stretch out, to the right and to the left of a sparsely furnished white hall, a series of rooms almost monastic, with their silent alcoves and their Virgins clad in dark velvet or light silk, each standing in her niche, protected by folding doors.

Everywhere are evidences of an austere life, perfect orderliness and gentle piety.

On the right the ground floor of the house leads into a gallery, the roof of which is supported by rude massive pillars. At the foot of these pillars a rustic garden runs riot.

As she was attending to her task and beating her dripping clothes, Maria Xiriball kept comparing la Solana to the beautiful house of the Syndic.

Formerly the Xiriballs and the family of the Syndic between them had owned the greater part of the valley: formerly — that is to say, centuries earlier, for with this unchanging race the past never dies.

The ancestors of the Syndic had kept intact and had even increased their patrimony while the Xiriballs had little by little

lost theirs. Of their former riches la Solana and the surrounding lands alone remained. That was ample for the family, but nothing more. The hour was about to strike, thought Maria, the hour which would bring back the old-time splendor of the Xiriballs, for to them had been given a son whose intelligence astounded his master.

"Perhaps he will be Syndic one of these days," Maria reflected dreamily.

So preoccupied she was that her beetle seemed to go on beating by itself, and the soapy water whitened the linen sheets heaped in her basket without her aid. The hoofs of mules were heard on the cobblestones. Pigeons cooed on the roofs. The deep blue of the sky was mirrored in the pool before her, across which flashed from time to time the sharp-pointed wing of a swallow.

A latent joy, repressed and deep, filled the air. To appreciate the triumph of summer, one must have known the pitiless rigor of mountain winters.

It is true that the rocky slopes change

but little; the eternal waters catch the same emeralds and sift the same foam into the same sheaths of granite; the pines keep their sombre garb at the edge of the same quiet lakes. Like mediæval towers the mountains lie immutable beneath the moving tide of the seasons.

But the little valleys grow green and gold, and there is more conscious joy in the iris blossoming on a steep cliff, in the sheaves of wheat shooting up like flames at the edge of a veritable abyss of hell, than in gardens and passionless plains.

Few songs rise from the Andorran fields, but the prudent eyes of the girls glitter like living water and the eyes of the men are as soft and warm as the sun.

But for the thought of Cisquo buried a few steps away, Maria would have hummed over her task. A neighbor helped her carry her heavy basket across the meadow, then left her to struggle alone against the wind that flung the wet linen against her arms.

"What can Conchita be doing?" she said aloud.

The cigar-maker, who was approaching, answered her, and together they spread the linen upon the grass. Below the meadow toward the Valira, fine fields of shimmering green wheat lay beyond those of the Xiriballs. Two youths under the supervision of an old man were working there.

"Your father's brother is having his weeding done," said Maria.

Conchita responded in the bitter tone that sometimes came to her lips of late:

"What good will all that land do him? It takes but little for a grave and he has no children left."

"Your father will inherit what he has."

"They are not on speaking terms . . . and so far as I am concerned small good would that do me! My brother will have it all and he will know how to use it."

She gave a short laugh to show how little she cared, and perhaps also because the sunlight invited the saddest to happiness. Round about her the spread-out linen shed a radiance that dazzled her eyes and lit up her brown skin. The light that bathed her

was warm and caressing, yet she would have liked to hide.

For had she not grown heavy and ugly and old? Old at sixteen, and indeed sixteen is quite an age in Andorra where until recently girls married at twelve.

Conchita's fleeting joy sank into bitterness. Maria, unimaginative as she was, believed she could arrange events according to her liking, but Concepcion Asnurri bent over them as over the book of fate. She had had singular forebodings of misfortune. Once she had warned a workman in a slate quarry:

"Be careful! The mountain will fall on you!"

Shortly afterward the man died, crushed by falling stone.

Maria Xiriball knew this peculiarity of Conchita's and tried to keep the girl from such sombre thoughts. But she believed implicitly in her predictions. It was anguish for her when Conchita asked suddenly:

"Where is Angelo?"

"With his father, I think," replied Maria. "To-day is Thursday. There is no school."

"Maria! Maria! The threshold of la Solana is still wet with blood, and you have allowed your son to leave you!"

"What are you saying? What do you see?" said the mother, gasping with terror.

Standing in the wind, her black hair whipped across her pale cheeks, her hands clasped and stretched out in desperation, her eyes looking into the distance, Conchita went on in a prophetic voice:

"Angelo is in the Gorges of Saint Anthony with Nyerro and the two mules on the way to Ord no. Angelo is running beside the torrent with Nyerro, ah, me, with Nyerro . . ."

She fell upon her knees moaning like one who emerges from a nightmare. Maria divined that the memory of Cisquo was seizing her by the throat and stifling her. Forgetting her own maternal anguish, she murmured tender words such as had not come to her lips since her first-born lay in the cradle.

"Oh, Maria! Maria!" sobbed the girl. "I am more to be pitied than the beasts of the woods, for they can at least keep their young with them. I have been ashamed of this child, I wished to die with him, but now I know I love him. Maria, I long to watch over him and see him grow."

Maria Xiriball's face suddenly became hard as she bent over her linen without replying.

"Perhaps he will look like him! He will love you, Maria."

Sunk down in her patched raiment, her hands clasped upon her knees, Conchita lifted her distressed young face toward the mother of Cisquo, who suddenly seemed to have been struck deaf.

"Have mercy! Help me!" begged the girl again.

The woman of Andorra strove to conceal her rising anger. Finally she said:

"Since when are bastards to be brought up in the bosom of the family? Do you think I want to see my son's child a servant or ill-treated?"

She added more gently:

"Joan will carry him to la Séo, as is customary, and we shall leave something for him at the foundling asylum, never fear!"

Carrying the full basket between them, they went off in silence to find out what had become of Angelo.

V

THE HOOTING OF THE OWL

ONE night an owl settled down upon the roof of la Solana and began to chant a dirge over the slumber of those who dwelt within. They awoke and tossed uneasily.

No doubt other owls had settled down upon the same roof and wailed as mournfully on moonlit nights like this; but that was before the death of Cisquo had spread fear through the household. It so happened that this cry expressed all the melancholy, all the lamentation, and all the uneasiness of the Xiriballs. Except Angelo, not one among them could sleep. And the wailing was endless. It seemed that the bird's strange crystal throat was drinking deep draughts of moonlight that it might give forth this soft and mournful sound. Hour after hour the moon poured down its light. From out the iridescent east it flowed, a broad blue stream between black banks of clouds. Standing by his window, harassed

by sleeplessness, Joan Xiriball looked upon the near-by mountains whose black-and-white masses were outlined against the sky like great monuments to the dead. Winds cold as the hands of the dead themselves blew over his feverish forehead. His head was full of cruel thoughts. A curse was upon the house. Some one wanted to kill Angelo as well as Cisquo, and perhaps Nyerro too. No, not Nyerro. The teacher had explained that Nyerro, a man grown, did not arouse envy as did this child, so beautiful, so strong, so intelligent, so like Cisquo, the pride of Joan.

How he had loved his Cisquo without ever letting it be seen! He had wished his childhood to be happy. He had considered him a compensation for his own life. How he had indulged him, although he never allowed a smile to cross his grave countenance! How much hidden affection, and how deep! Cisquo . . . !

An unknown monster had left him to moulder in the ground. Could such things be? Was it possible that the avenging

hands of his father had not yet shouldered a gun, crushed an arm, wrung a neck?

Was it possible that the assassin still breathed pure air, ate white bread and drank wine, cultivated his land, and saw it fruitful as if he were blessed of God?

Joan Xiriball clenched his teeth. A prey to fear, he returned to lie down beside Maria. Restless, she cursed the owl.

Finally she arose in her turn and sat upon the stone bench near the window. So tragic was this black-and-white night that the woman of Andorra crossed herself as she would in a cemetery. Great ink-black clouds rushed up from the east in the train of the moon and glided after her like sombre servitors. And suddenly there seemed a night within the night.

The owl said to Maria Xiriball:

"If Nyerro one day triumphs over Angelo, it will be his wife who will reign at la Solana. And how would the two treat Maria and her son? They would make servants of them. Would it not be better for Angelo to leave for the seminary now

and to return to the country years later dressed in priestly robes that all would respect? His mother would go to live with him and he would be a kind master to her . . ."

Héreu or priest, such should be the destiny of Angelo. But younger son, conco, perhaps the servant of Nyerro? Never!

Old Lola's *Ave* hissed through her toothless mouth. She could not sleep. Because of this bird of ill-omen, foreboding one knew not what, all la Solana was the prey of a sleepless night and haunting dreams.

Maria Xiriball had scarcely lain down again when the old master himself rose, and with one of those impulsive and violent movements of which old age had not cured him, he took down his gun and twice shot through the open window. The bird was silenced and, freed from this torment, la Solana went to sleep.

Nyerro awoke at daybreak. He yawned noisily, opened the door for Mourillo who in the summer slept without, then dressed, and rubbed down his mules, always his first

thought. At the age of sixteen, when Maria had asked him to say a prayer, he had retorted, pointing to his mules: "They are my prayers." Although Maria was indignant, she found an excuse in his feeble-mindedness.

His mules were strong and beautiful. Before the regular mail service was established between Spain and Andorra, the two older ones had twice each day covered the twenty kilometres that separated Andorra from la Séo d'Urgel.

For three years Nyerro had accompanied them, and he still kept in a corner of the stable their cast-off trappings decked with red pompons and little bells. Along with these veterans, three young mules were growing fast, quite forgetful of the pastures of Poitou from which they had come. One named Ourdillo was restive under the saddle and in the habit of rearing, but Nyerro vowed that he would train her and refused to part with her.

The Xiriballs heeded him when he talked of mules, for he was past-master in

raising them. So they kept Ourdillo, a black mule, long and feline, with a sloping back.

That morning Nyerro increased her ration of oats, for he was to take her and another of his mules to la Massana for a load of charcoal. Joyfully he rubbed down their glossy flanks, filled their manger, and mended a harness.

Suddenly the behavior of his dog attracted his attention. The animal was barking in a subdued way, gambolling about and sniffing, his nose in a heap of logs. "What is the matter, Mourillo?" The imploring golden eyes shone like embers. Nyerro climbed up on the logs and there he discovered the owl huddled against the wall, quivering, with dilated pupils, superb and wretched.

A low laugh shook Nyerro; his hand, his uncanny hand with its flattened thumb, trembled with pleasure as he seized the bird. The owl uttered a moan.

Mourillo barked joyously, now standing on his hind legs, now dancing in his eager-

ness. What a treat! He could sink his teeth into living flesh, tear it, drink hot blood. Far from forbidding him such voluptuous enjoyment, his master had taught it to him, had set him on the trail of all possible prey and feasted his eyes upon carnage. Honest Mourillo had grown bloodthirsty and also hypocritical, for it is fitting to hide such instincts.

"Here! Gently!" said Nyerro, whose eyes seemed to be in quest of something.

He clutched the neck of the owl so relentlessly that the prisoner, half stifled, slowly gave himself up to his destiny, knowing only too well what a vanquished bird may expect from a man.

His wide wings, tawny and veined with gold on top, a delicate gray beneath, were already spread. Truly this owl, with its breastplate of gold and enamel eyes, was as beautiful as an idol. But in the heart of Nyerro was only hatred, scorn, and cruelty.

He took a hammer and a great nail and stood before the door of the stable, lit up by the rising sun.

But why describe things, the mere recollection of which turns cold the heart of him who saw them as a child? Why dwell upon the ignominy of a man incapable of pity?

When the owl was nailed to the door, facing the sun, facing the man, both his tormentors, he uttered a long wail, desperately clenched his claws, and opened and closed his beak. Then he knew peace.

His heart's blood, drop by drop, ran down the door, whence Mourillo, standing on his hind legs, licked it greedily. Seated on an old beam, forgetful of his task, and twirling his broad thumbs, Nyerro gloated over this spectacle.

Suddenly a voice cried:

"Oh, how wicked you are! It is shameful, what you have done! If only the schoolmaster could see you! Don't you know how wrong it is to hurt animals?"

Red with anger, his young face distorted with horror, Angelo shook his brother by the arm.

The latter laughed and said: "He kept us all awake, I have had my revenge. I had

a perfect right to it. And now leave me alone. I am going to la Massana with the mules."

This shrewd answer distracted the child's thought, always easily diverted. He begged his brother to take him along. Nyerro did not give in at once. It was doubtful whether his mother would let him go. It would be better to tell no one but his father or grandfather, who were not so hard to convince. Nyerro was merely giving him a piece of advice. He needed no one to go with him, especially as he was going to ride one of the mules and would have an easy trip.

"I will ride the other, on the way over," exclaimed the delighted Angelo.

He waited for his mother to set out for the wash-house, then ran to speak to his father.

Joan was indulgent to his children. He loved them with a rough but deep tenderness; it caused him real suffering to refuse them a pleasure. So he granted Angelo's request and said to Nyerro:

"I trust you with him. Look out for him. See to it you don't leave him one instant. You are stronger than he, and must protect him. Be sure he doesn't ride Ourdillo, but Castagné, for she is tamer."

So Angelo mounted Castagné and Nyerro Ourdillo, who seemed quiet enough. They avoided going through the village for fear of meeting Maria Xiriball. The mountain led them to the Gorges of Saint Anthony.

These are the wildest if not the deepest gorges in Andorra. A green torrent, accompanied by a mule-path, follows their sharp curves like an adder. It runs between two gigantic natural walls of crumbling stone, roofed by the harsh blue of the summer or by the stone gray of the winter skies. Here grow only stunted black boxwood, brambles and broom. There are no woods; there is not a single tree. These mountains are congealed in a death-like immobility. Nothing lives in them but the waters, falling, flowing, dashing, glaucous and black — the brutal waters that corrode the stone after they have laid it bare.

At every step the traveller must reckon with the water. It invades the path, spreads across it, and cuts it in two. At times it falls in cascades, flinging its fluid fantastic self to the winds, which scatter it and hurl it in the face of the passer-by.

Beneath the burning sun, it is fresh, spontaneous, like the frolicking of a child, a fragrant little shower, while the wet rocks glitter, suddenly set with emeralds.

Under a winter sky, the Gorges of Saint Anthony, filled with wind, bark like a pack of hounds. The mule-drivers, their breath cut, their eyes blinded by the spray, one hand clutching their capes, the other leading their weary beasts, struggle through the treacherous snow with its thousand ambushes. The sky is low and tinged with green. Tatters of fog float over the mountain, now revealing a sharp rock, a dried bush, the weird silhouette of a bounding izard, or a lone pine with its monk's robe billowing in the wind.

To you, Saint Anthony, patron of mule-drivers, protector of all who cross the moun-

tain, the pious Andorrans, centuries ago, erected a sanctuary in these Gorges. In times like these you manifest your power. Holding back with your starry tunic the bounding white flocks of the avalanche, you allow the mules and mule-drivers to pass.

That is why the earthen floor of your chapel is covered with pennies, pennies that grateful mule-drivers throw you through the iron gate, repeating the prayer their elders have said before them.

Saint Anthony, are you likewise watching over the last of the Xiriballs?

The boy recklessly mounted Nyerro's mule. The idea occurred to him because the elder persistently made fun of Castagné as compared with his own spirited mount. Angelo, put on his mettle, leapt upon the back of Ourdillo. Nyerro swore that he would never tell their father.

Nyerro trudged on behind him, explaining that he didn't care to ride the lazy Castagné.

The path wound upward, sloping toward the right, following the whim of the moun-

tain. On the left the torrent, green as unripe fruit, broke upon the rocks like glass: the noise of the waters grew louder and louder. Angelo laughed at the fear his mule showed at the slightest provocation; a boiling brook she had to cross, a bird darting suddenly from out a bush, the falling of a stone made her rear and leap back toward the torrent.

Suddenly she swerved so sharply that the frightened child called, "Nyerro!" But where was Nyerro? No one answered. From his dangerous position Angelo was looking frantically for his brother, when of a sudden a large stone broken loose from the mountain rolled toward him and miraculously passed between the legs of Ourdillo, without harming him.

But terror-stricken, the mule reared once more and fell into the torrent.

"Saint Anthony!" cried the desperate voice of Angelo. Then silence.

The Xiriballs had gathered for the midday meal when a procession similar to that

which had brought Cisquo home appeared before la Solana. Only, and thanks be given to Saint Anthony, protector of those who cross the mountain, Angelo, though injured, was smiling as he lay upon his stretcher of leafy branches.

Mule-drivers of la Massana had come upon him lying unconscious at the edge of the water which was washing his wounds. Near him was the mule, who had regained her footing and impatiently struck the rock with her hoofs. The noise had attracted the attention of the men.

They told how they had saved him and laid emphasis upon Nyerro's despair. The latter, who was picking medicinal herbs — for old Lola, no doubt — high above the path, had not been aware of what had happened.

"If you will allow me to say so, Xiriball, he must be rather simple-minded," remarked one of the mule-drivers. "But he certainly was distressed. I can vouch for his grief. He was crazed and on the point of running away; but we prevented him, and,

when we had gotten the mule back in the path, we told your son to go on his way, saying we would look after the little boy: it was better for him not to remain, since he was of no help. By evening he will have regained his senses."

Old Anton shook his head and said:

"I must confess he is rather simple-minded except when he is working on the land. When he comes back, no one must speak to him of this accident. He might lose his reason altogether."

In her maternal sorrow Maria Xiriball found courage to reproach the old man for trying to shield Nyerro, and by his silence Joan showed approval. Had he not entrusted the child to Nyerro? Had he not forbidden him to let him ride Ourdillo? He sat by the bedside of his son, as the doctor dressed the wounds. Joan had reached a new station of his cross. He looked straight ahead; he saw as in a vision rolling down from the mountain — and in obedience to whose will, Santa Madona? — the stone that had threatened the life of the last of the Xiriballs.

How right the schoolmaster had been to warn Joan! How clearly this learned man had seen through the obscurity that surrounds such tragic accidents!

Clasping Angelo's feverish hand, Joan was thinking slowly, heavily, as he was accustomed to plough. To him fell the difficult task of defending his son and his race. But against whom? Is there any protection against the homicidal lightning that sometimes falls upon carefully closed houses?

How can you lay hold of the wrist that strikes in the dark? Despite his great physical strength, Joan Xiriball felt himself helpless Intelligence, learning, shrewdness, such were the only weapons that might save his race!

He resolved to visit the schoolmaster and to confide his fears to him.

He chose two of the finest hens in the poultry-yard and set out. The master gave a cordial welcome to Joan and his offering, for he was wise enough not to scorn the humble pleasures of this world. If he in-

dulged in them sparingly, it was in the hope of enjoying them the more thoroughly. Merely from the way he poured the rancio into a glass one would know that he was a true Epicurean. He gave warm welcome to Joan, but when he heard the tale of the latest accident, his face clouded. He was fond of Angelo and feared for his life. The falling of the stone worried him as much as it did Joan.

"Mind my words, Xiriball, I believe as you do that this stone was thrown by the person who shot your Cisquo. If you feel inclined, go tell the sheriff of your suspicions, but in any case send Angelo away, for he must leave home! I shall miss him, but it is unavoidable. Send him to the seminary at la Séo."

"But I don't want to make a priest of him!" Joan protested. "He has no inclination that way."

"Make people believe he has. That alone will save him. If he is one day to be your héreu, let no one know it until he is full-grown and strong."

"Cisquo was full-grown and strong," sighed the father.

The master grew impatient.

"We must do what we can. In five years' time many things may happen. You may find the culprit. Follow my advice, Xiriball."

Joan made up his mind to obey. He spoke first to his father, who approved. Should Angelo become a priest the question of the inheritance would be settled. Then the only thing to do would be to marry off Nyerro, who was a good fellow, a good worker, and an obedient son. Old Lola did not attempt to conceal her joy. With Nyerro the heir and Angelo a priest, her pride and satisfaction would be complete. When Maria was told, she burst out with cries and reproaches. She would, indeed, have been proud to give one of her sons to God if she had had several. But she wanted grandchildren, and she wanted to see Angelo master of la Solana. Otherwise . . .

Contrary to her habit she gave such free course to her indignation that Joan seized her roughly by the wrist:

"Do you want them to kill him, too, as they did the other?" he said in a broken voice. "The stone was thrown on purpose. If they know our boy is going to be a priest, they will let him live, I trust . . . Nyerro, who is grown, can protect himself. It is better people should believe he is the heir rather than Angelo," he concluded, somewhat embarrassed, for was he not the father of both?

This quenched the mother's anger. She shuddered as she listened.

"He will submit, and so shall I," she murmured, for she was intimidated.

The next day she went through the village spreading the news that Angelo was to be a priest, God willing.

Rarely had the lands of the Xiriballs yielded as rich a crop as that year. Cured of his one-time apathy, Nyerro worked whole-souledly from daybreak till nightfall, taking great pains to spare his grandfather.

He would scarcely allow Angelo to take from one meadow to another the sheep lately

returned from their wintering in Spain. He fenced them in and left them for a few days, for it is in this economical fashion that the Andorrans fertilize their lands. Nyerro would say to his brother:

"Enjoy yourself. It is your vacation time and I will attend to the work."

Every one admired Nyerro's unselfishness.

The time of the Orri had come; shepherds and shepherdesses gathered the sheep together, milked them, and carried the milk down to the village, where it was made into cheese. While the men of la Solana worked in the fields, Maria and Angelo, sometimes with the help of Conchita, looked after the sheep.

It was a diversion for the two women. Freed from all restraint, they could safely exchange confidences only a few steps away from the indifferent Angelo. Brought back to life by their love beautiful Cisquo seemed to return to them and to reign supreme.

"Ah, Conchita," sighed the mother. "You know I do not forget his soul and

have masses said for its repose; but will his body rest in peace so long as he goes unavenged?"

"The Xiriballs do not know how to hate," said Concepcion Asnurri. "Behold, they abandon the search and forget the wrong which has been done them."

"Joan has not forgotten," protested Maria. "He thinks Angelo's life is in danger. That is why he is sending him away."

As she spoke, her eyes rested lovingly upon Angelo, reading near by. Conchita, who had been kneeling during the conversation, rose and her beautiful dark face grew cloudy like a summer night. She said harshly:

"You prefer flight to pursuit. Why don't you talk to the magistrate? The Corts are to meet soon. Why doesn't Joan Xiriball seek justice there?"

Maria and Conchita so blew upon the embers of Joan's hatred that he finally went to lay the case before the Corts. In the

presence of the women's sombre eyes, casting haunted looks upon him, he had been like a man overcome by a strange power.

Yes, he would see one of the two magistrates and explain the matter to him. Turning over this idea in his mind, he betook himself to la Casa dé la Vall, a massive structure of the sixteenth century where the General Council of the Valleys was in session. He passed through the low doorway surmounted by the coat of arms of Andorra, in which the crosier and mitre of the Bishop of Urgel, the cows of Béarn, and the escutcheon of the Count of Foix appear side by side.

Above, this old Latin inscription stands out in letters of gold:

Domus consilii — Sedes justitiæ.
Suspice: Sunt vallis neutris hæc stemmata, suntque
Regna, quibus gaudent nobiliora tegi:
Singula si populos alios, Andorra, beabunt
Quidni juncta ferent aurea secla tibi!

Behold, these are the insignia of a neutral valley and of kingdoms by which those greater than they are proud of having been protected.

Andorra, if each of these powers in itself has made other peoples happy, how can their alliance fail to give you golden centuries?

The first room Joan entered was quite bare and paved with little stones forming a crude mosaic.

The only thing to be seen in the back of the room was an old coffer containing the frightful garrote, that Spanish guillotine which tortures the condemned man before it kills him. Facing the entrance a door opens into a large room, which in its turn leads to one still larger where the Corts meet. Great black cloaks called "gambettos" and three-cornered hats, the insignia of the dignity of the consuls, always hang on the walls. At regular intervals ghosts seem to emerge from the mists of the past, faces grow clearer; these heirs of the dead clad in their archaic garments are so like them that at first sight it is hard to believe that the Corts there assembled belong to modern and not ancient times. In this room can be seen the antique chest that contains the archives of the six parishes.

It has a special lock for each parish, and it can therefore be opened only when representatives of the six parishes are present with their keys.

At the back of the room behind opened swinging doors, a priest says mass, as priests did three hundred years ago, calling down the blessing of God upon the justice of men.

There is on the second floor of la Casa dé la Vall a room whose frescoed walls are now, alas, being defaced by the school-children who gather there. These pious paintings, naïve in their conception, naïve in their execution, deserve more respect.

The most interesting part of the house is, perhaps, the rustic dark kitchen, lit only by a kind of cellar-window and by the vague light coming through the great chimney, a cone-shaped, gloomy opening in the middle of the arched ceiling.

Heavy chains and a huge crane, triangular in shape, hang in this chimney. Enormous andirons, a gigantic spit, and a pile of coals show that here are roasted whole sheep

and quarters of beef when custom requires that the magistrates be fed at la Casa dé la Vall. It is at the call of the Syndic of the Valleys that the illustrious Council gathers five times a year. But it may also meet at other times upon the request of a private citizen, who then bears all the expense.

Walking to and fro, indifferent to other petitioners or litigants gathered there, Joan Xiriball wondered to which of the two provosts he should speak, the French or the Spanish.

He knew them both and knew that they were well-disposed toward him. He resolved to let chance decide, and awaited the breaking-up of the Corts. There was a noise of moving benches, and he knew the time was near. Joan stood watching the door. Soon the Syndic and the councillors appeared in their picturesque costumes: short breeches with red woollen sashes and waistcoats, buckled shoes, long, old-fashioned cloaks of black lined with crimson, their heads covered with red caps under black three-cornered hats.

Joan greeted them. They acknowledged his greeting, for the Xiriballs were of good stock and greatly respected.

The two provosts came out together talking. The Spaniard, a robust old man with a fresh complexion, stopped from time to time to emphasize his words with a gesture, and the Frenchman, younger, with a thin, intelligent face, cast glances toward the newcomers as he listened to his companion.

He knew them all and knew their history, as did his Spanish colleague who lived in the region. Moreover, he spoke Catalan like an Andorran.

But Joan decided that, since he had already approached the sheriff, who represented the bishop, he ought now to speak to the one next him in authority, the bishop's provost.

And in one breath, as shy people are wont to do, he related the murder of Cisquo and told of his suspicion. From the glances exchanged by the two provosts, who had suddenly grown grave, Joan understood that they had been told of his case. But the

story of the stone falling upon Angelo astounded the bishop's provost.

"Stones roll of their own accord in Andorra, Xiriball, and, so far as I am concerned, I can see no connection between this latest incident and the unfortunate death of your son."

Stubbornly, because the women had convinced him, Joan insisted:

"It was the same murderer in both cases. I am certain his purpose is vengeance. Some one wants to put an end to the Xiriballs, but, in the name of God, who can it be?"

The provost reminded Joan that he had once before entertained unfounded suspicions and advised him to be very cautious. At the same time he assured him that the sheriff had the whole affair in mind and that they still hoped to obtain results.

Joan had to content himself with these promises. He returned home deeply disappointed as though he had hoped for a miracle.

Seated at one end of the kitchen on the stone bench, Maria was sorting beans while

Conchita smoothed out tobacco leaves. Their two anxious faces turned toward Joan. He merely shrugged his shoulders like a weary man, and curtly asked for his lunch.

Old Xiriball came in at that moment. He sat down opposite Joan and the two ate in silence; then they left together for the fields.

Maria Xiriball set a plate of soup before Conchita on the stone bench.

"Eat this, child. Your father is not at home. You will grow faint with nothing but a piece of bread. You must eat, Conchita."

The girl obeyed and satisfied her hunger. Then she said in a gentle voice:

"It seems to me my mother has come back. What should I do without you, Maria? I should have killed myself . . ."

"Ah, Conchita, may the Holy Virgin forgive you!"

Conchita crossed herself humbly.

"Never fear, Maria, I want to live. I want to see the murderer punished. I want to live, but I am afraid I shall die soon, when my child comes. . . . At times I feel myself

forsaken! Will not the good God have mercy upon me, despite my sin? The priest has absolved me, and I shall live an honest life. No one will ever dare to make light of Concepcion Asnurri. I want to live — to live, Maria! Will you go with me Sunday morning to Santa Coloma? I long to make the pilgrimage that God may have mercy upon me."

"Poor child!" said the mother of Cisquo, shedding tears.

Dry-eyed, her voice harsh, her beautiful, passionate face raised toward the window and drenched with light, Conchita went on:

"I am more wretched, more abandoned than the beasts of the woods. Scorned by all, beaten by my father, disdained by my brother . . . And yet, Maria, what have I done, after all? I was an ignorant girl. I followed him into the mountains and he was so beautiful that I would have knelt before him had he asked me to. I loved him as I loved God, and the priest says that is my greatest sin. For he well knows I had no thought of evil. I shall lead an honest life,

Maria. Do I really deserve this jeering and these blows? I am only sixteen and my mother is dead. Why did she not take me with her? Or why cannot the child take me along with him to the humble place where he will be hidden? I could be a servant there, near him as he grew up . . . I . . ."

"Be still!" cried the Andorran woman. "You owe yourself to your father and not to a bastard."

"But it is the child I love, this child who is my own . . ."

She was going to say "who is our own," but she did not dare, and burst into tears. Upstairs old Lola, aware of the sound of weeping, struck her stick on the floor to find out what was going on.

"Be calm," implored Maria Xiriball. "I will accompany you to Santa Coloma. And we will make a robe for Our Lady of All Healing. I have little garments that belonged to my Cisquo when he was small. I will show them to you and you shall choose."

With a quick step, happy to have

changed the course of Conchita's thoughts, Maria spread before her treasures sacred to a mother. Caps of white piqué, swaddling clothes of heavy linen, little cotton and woollen dresses edged with simple scallops.

Conchita's hands touched these frail objects with respect.

"Happy are the women who have the right to dress and care for their little ones! How sweet it must be to sew for the child that is to come . . ."

"Conchita . . ." said Maria in an altered voice, "where do you get such ideas? How changed you are! You don't speak as the other girls in the village do."

Sorrowful, grave, and slow, the girl's glance turned toward her friend.

"How could I speak like the others? Am I not she who has nothing, and who never will have anything? She who weeps day and night, who loves love and has lost love, who loves honor and has lost honor? Speak like the others, Maria! I should not be true to myself.

"Ah," she said, her face suddenly trans-

figured, "look at the lovely little blue dress with the lace! How pretty a child would look in it, with its little neck, its little arms ... Maria, may I put this on the Madonna?"

Maria bent her head. A deep emotion filled her heart at the thought that a dress once worn by her Cisquo would clothe the Virgin. The two women discussed the shape to be given the fragile garment. You see Our Lady holds her tiny child upon her knees and so the dress must enfold them both; the right sleeve must be taken out, for the right arm of the statue is close to the body; while in the left the opening must be lowered to make room for the child that lies on the heart of Madame Marie like a flame ...

This gives a garment a strange appearance, quite celestial, for it has naught in common with our poor earthly bodies. Conchita was determined to follow the divine pattern. There should be nothing human in this robe. She had only one regret. She would have liked to have an opening in the back to allow wings to slip through. She

would have liked to add a train spangled with stars. But Madame Marie is far simpler than that. She is merely a mother holding her baby to her heart of flesh.

It was a blissful task for Conchita! A joy to be able without concealment or shame to sew on the dress of a little child!

She sang — yes, sang at last! Sang a lullaby learned from her mother long ago. How touching and beautiful she was, seated on her old stone bench, sewing for Madame Marie!

Holy Virgin, Mother of the unhappy, do you not smile upon the task of Conchita, Conchita the sinner, who is yet a believer? Do not your rose-colored lips murmur a word of pardon in the ear of her who sinned for the sake of love? Do not your angels cleanse with fragrant flowers the heart whose joy was so brief, whose penitence is so long?

Is there not more pity in heaven than among men? Does not their hypocrisy and their relentlessness tear your great and simple mother heart?

The following Sunday, Conchita and Maria Xiriball attended the five o'clock mass and took Communion that they might be more worthy to visit Marie; then set out through the biting wind in the direction of Santa Coloma.

The village lay stagnant in semi-darkness; night seemed to cling to the very sandals of the mountaineers, still heavy with sleep. The bluish streets covered by the broad, overhanging roofs revealed only a narrow, winding ribbon of saffron, crossed here and there by flocks of rose-colored pigeons. Few windows were open, for the mountaineer seldom airs his house; and behind the window-panes against the dark background of the rooms could be seen the olive faces of girls unfolding their Sunday clothes.

No songs as yet, but upon the stones the resounding steps of mules, with the tinkling of their bells. The mule-drivers greeted Maria, then looked upon her young companion with a mocking light in their eyes. But Conchita was holding close to her heart the little dress she was going to give the

Madonna, and the morning was fair to her.

As they left the village, the mountain rose before the pilgrims and guided them, for the road followed the mountain-side which in the misty dawn took on the soft purple of wild plums.

In the blue light the falling waters seemed immovable in their whiteness, like trails of snow forgotten by winter, like a pattern in ivory upon a blade of steel. These lofty hieratic walls of stone were motionless sentries of the night, but at their base, in the undergrowth, and in the heart of the woods, life was beginning to stir.

Little by little the fiery light of the summits crumbled into avalanches, tinted the sharp edges of the rocks, turned to flame the living waters, and dipped in crimson the tawny wings of the eagles soaring above the gentle awakening of the smaller birds.

"Many little creatures will be devoured this day," said Conchita, in a pensive mood.

"Everything has a right to live," observed Maria. "But eagles, I grant, are

cruel. Cisquo never missed them. What a good shot he was!"

"And what a good shot some one else was!"

This sharp answer burst from her lips as if Conchita wished to punish the mother for having displayed more pride than sorrow in her voice.

Maria furtively wiped away a tear.

"Whenever you are tired, we will sit down and rest," she said gently.

"You are kind and I am growing wicked," sighed the girl.

In the far-distant landscape they could already see, near a group of chestnut-trees, the little Romanesque chapel of Santa Coloma, its round tower topped by a light slate roof like the hat of a mandarin. Detached from its setting, this chapel has the quaint charm of a little girl in old-fashioned clothes.

The pitiless austerity of the manifold mountains puts grave thoughts into the dark glance of its little windows and emphasizes the bareness of its walls.

Nothing can be joyous in this region; everything is solemn as if weighed down with eternity.

Conchita crossed the threshold of the chapel with a prayer in her heart.

Although, upon the high altar, Santa Coloma reigned supreme, heavy, yet graceful, all gilded and surrounded by her golden doves, Conchita saw only Maria, Mother of Sorrows, Maria honored in this place under the name of Our Lady of All Healing, whose power was proved by innumerable thank offerings. Little feet of plaster, little faces of wax, plaits of hair, old Andorran kerchiefs embroidered with roses — all this touching and mystic bric-à-brac made a halo about Madame Marie, whose fixed eyes gazed beyond the walls of the chapel into we know not what mysterious land.

"Oh! Mother of us all," murmured Conchita, "have pity upon my misery and do not cast me off, despite my sin. Poor as I am, I longed to bring you a robe, and here is a little dress for you and your child. . . . Maria, Mother of Sorrows, what will you give my child?"

Unfolding her dress, Conchita went on:

"I dare not put it on you, for my hands are sullied, but I will hang it here, very near you, on this nail, so that some pious priest may clothe you in it upon a holy day; and then you will think of Conchita; of him who sleeps beneath the ground and of our child, of the child without a father . . . without a mother.

"And you will have pity on him who is to be born amidst tears! And you will guide those who are seeking out the murderer of Cisquo! May he be punished! May blood be shed for blood!"

Uplifted by her meditation, Conchita had risen and now spoke aloud, her hands outstretched toward the Virgin. The sparse light fell upon her pallid face, the white of her eyes shone, as did her sharp and somewhat irregular teeth. Her forehead and her smooth black hair, encircling her head in braids, were shining too.

Sixteen years old. Was it possible that she was only sixteen? A woman through suffering, love, and hatred, a woman in the

tone of despair and of passion she had put in her prayer. She should, perhaps, have prayed with more humility, patience, and self-forgetfulness. Perhaps she should not have cried out for vengeance at the foot of her who forgave the unforgivable.

So thought Maria Xiriball. But she did not know how to express her thoughts and she waited for Conchita to finish her supplication. Ave followed Ave. Crouched upon her heels, the young girl prayed on and on, an incessant flow of words pouring from her lips, her eyes, which were those of a child-woman, fixed upon the eyes of the Virgin.

"Did you ask for a little happiness, pobreta?" inquired Maria, as she crossed the threshold of the chapel.

"Happiness for me, Maria, whence would it come?"

For a second they both faced the destiny of women, and in truth in the walls that hemmed them about they saw no rift through which happiness might slip in.

"God is all powerful" murmured Maria

Xiriball. "He made the earth out of nothingness."

They seated themselves side by side upon a mound in the meadow-like cemetery that lay before the chapel. The sun had just cleared the valley of its last shadows; a little light fluttered like a butterfly above the course of the Valira. Because it was Sunday, the peasants were resting from their labors, and only the herdsmen followed by their indolent cows were slowly moving among the groups of people going to mass. Maria opened the basket and shared her bread and ham with Conchita.

While they ate in silence, their souls and bodies comforted, an old woman, knotted with her years and leaning on her cane, appeared before them, now mumbling, now cursing. She did not lift the lids of her inflamed eyes; and seemed to see but dimly.

"Is there any one here?" asked the woman suddenly, turning toward the two friends. She had the broken and peremptory voice of the aged.

Maria replied: "Yes, there are two of us here."

"Who are you?"

"I am one of the Xiriballs of la Solana, and the girl with me is Concepcion Asnurri."

"Xiriball? Yes, yes, who does not know the Xiriballs of Andorra? Yes, indeed. They even say: 'As honest as the Xiriballs!' And one of them died in the mountain. Died near my house — yes, very near.... God help us, poor mortals What do you want of me?"

A hand had seized her arm as she hobbled on toward the chapel. With the angry, frightened motion she made to free herself, her faded red kerchief had slipped down to her shoulders and her head appeared like a dry wooden ball spotted with white down. This mummified old head reminded one of a stump half covered over with lichen.

The voice repeated:

"What do you want of me? Caramba! Let me go my way!"

"I am the mother of Cisquo Xiriball, and

I am searching for his murderer. Did you see any one pass that night?"

"I? Merciful God!" cried the old woman excitedly. "I, who can scarcely see my own hands? I, see some one in the night? When I heard the two gunshots I rushed to my window; a man ran by; a man, mayhap a demon! For I saw nothing, nothing!"

"It was he . . . the murderer!" panted Conchita, who was barring the old woman's way.

She was deadly pale and her knees trembled so that she could hardly stand.

"You are mad," growled the old creature, gesticulating. "You are mad. Let me go, caraï!"

"Not until you have told us all you know!" was Conchita's reply.

"And who are you, girl?"

"An unhappy wretch! But what does that matter to you? You are not so blind as you pretend to be. I just caught you looking at me."

She had seen the scorn in the eyes of the old woman.

"And you were careful, too, to walk around a tomb so as not to stumble over it! You shall tell us all you know!"

"Haven't I told you, girl, that I know nothing!" moaned the old woman.

"If you dare to tell a lie in this place, dire misfortune will come upon you! The Madonna whom you offend with your deceit will turn away from you! Disease will destroy your flocks . . ." gasped Conchita, her forefinger pointing at the terrified woman.

As she called down these curses upon her, the face of Conchita grew livid, for she had faith in the power of her own words. "May Saint Coloma and Our Lady of All Healing hear you! The dead calls for vengeance. What did he look like, he who passed in the moonlight?"

"It was dark."

"The moon was shining," repeated Conchita. "Was he tall or short?"

"Tall and thin, yes, tall and thin, I swear it. Now, leave me alone! He will avenge himself upon me as it is! You are mad, stark mad!"

Feeling Conchita's hand loosen its grasp, the old woman made her escape, wailing as she went.

"Did you hear what she said, Maria? He is tall and thin."

"That won't help us very much," sighed Maria, leading the girl away.

As they went off, from within the chapel, through the half-opened door, the old woman, fingering her beads, followed them with her cunning and frightened little eyes which no longer feared the light of day.

VI

THE SEMINARY

NEVER would Angelo Xiriball have grown accustomed to the Seminary had it not been for Paquita. He made her acquaintance shortly after his arrival, thanks to the slapping and scratching she gave him for no particular reason.

Angelo pulled her hair. She stuck out her tongue in defiance and then ran away. She was twelve years old and he was fourteen, truly the age of great battles.

At this point, the father superior, who, his breviary in his hand, was meditating as he walked slowly up and down between the flower-beds, called Angelo and reproached him gently. He was not to ill-treat this little girl whose mother, a worthy widow, was the cook of the Seminary. They had allowed her to keep Paquita, who had already shown herself industrious and intelligent. Why should Angelo be rough with her?

Red with indignation, the child declared that Paquita had "begun it."

"It was because you stepped on her flowers, my boy," the priest explained. "As you ran by, you upset a pot of fuchsias that she dearly loves! Go and see!"

Full of confusion the boy went and examined the flower-pot lying half empty in the path. He picked it up, put the plant back as best he could, then began to examine this unfamiliar flower as his master, who was fond of botany, had taught him to do.

It was Sunday. Vespers had been sung and Angelo was free in the great low-walled garden. Flocks of swallows were flying south. In the east delicately tinted mountains lay like stagnant waters mirroring the sky. The distant horizon, the wide blue vault that rose above the town, filled the young Andorran with wonder. Yet the sky he loved best was upheld by slender mountain peaks, spreading its canopy of silver above green Andorra.

The north! Toward the north, only

twenty kilometres from la Séo d'Urgel, la Solana stood wrapped in peace, as the days rolled gently over it. At dawn Nyerro groomed his mules, at nightfall Conchita, the friend of the Xiriballs, arrived with her leaves of tobacco to work with them, while father and grandfather slowly talked together, their elbows on the table.

Never, never would Angelo grow used to this walled-in life, and these school-benches, to this collective silence, to these rules and regulations. But for Paquita he would have fled from the Seminary one evening when homesickness had become acute. But Paquita had come . . .

She had given him a good slap, run off at full speed, and then, crouching behind a boxwood bush, watched her victim.

See! The furious demon who had just shaken her so violently now bent over her flowers, caressing them as he would have caressed a bird fallen from the nest. He quite forgot the father superior, who, after observing the boy for a moment, had resumed his walk and his pious reading. He

quite forgot the Seminary. . . . All this for a flower!

The little girl slipped quietly out from behind her bush. This tall dark boy seemed to be attracted by an unknown thing as he looked at the fuchsia. His interest impressed her greatly; with a somewhat coquettish gesture she smoothed back her black hair, straightened her gray cotton pinafore, and bounded toward Angelo, sleek and sly as a little cat.

"What . . . What makes you look at my flower like that?" she said.

For she wished to share his enjoyment.

Angelo turned toward her the same searching glance that he had cast upon the fuchsia. Again Paquita straightened her pinafore and, seizing in her left hand the lock of unruly hair that hung over her temple, she pushed up the red ribbon that tied it. Her hair, thick and stiff, seemed to wrap her little head in a cap of black satin. Her skin was sallow, prone to shine, and strewn with golden freckles beneath her slanting eyes. Angelo thought Paquita was as ugly

as Conchita was beautiful, but that her green eyes and her lips rather pleasantly suggested a cat.

This comparison led him to consider on his bleeding hand the marks of the little girl's nails.

"Are you . . . are you angry?" she asked repentantly. "I am very bad, I know."

Before Angelo realized what she was doing she had seized his hand, kissed his wound passionately, and dashed off shouting to relieve the tenseness of her nerves.

In a few days they had learned each other's names and took pleasure in using them.

"How handsome you are!" said Paquita.

And Angelo burst out laughing, pulling her black lock with its red ribbon.

There was in the young mountaineer a latent tenderness, a longing for affection which his parents, at once simple and austere, had never satisfied. The aristocratic delicacy of his features, a delicacy not infrequently found in the humblest Andorran peasants, well became his naturally fine in-

stincts. In the person of Angelo there had been born into the Xiriball household a being rich in moral and physical beauty. So there are plants that flower quite miraculously in untilled soil. That is why he noticed the feline grace of Paquita, as he had noticed the beauty of Conchita.

He became attached to the little girl and grew accustomed to his surroundings. Under the sagacious eyes of the paternal priests, closer to their young pupils than are French teachers, the two lived happy hours together, hours full of unconscious tenderness. The fathers were quite aware that Angelo was resigned to his captivity only because of Paquita; and for the time being they decided not to separate the children.

One Sunday they even allowed Angelo to go out with Paquita and her mother. Winter was drawing near with slow, frosty steps: bitter winds from the north whistled through the narrow lanes, too narrow for any vehicle to pass. On the old balconies where the geraniums were slowly dying, young girls appeared, hung out their

clothes, and, shivering, hastened back to warm rooms.

Following the cook, Angelo went from the spacious new quarters of the town to those made up of archaic structures resting upon arcades and enlivened by façades of different colors. The effect of the whole was at once severe and charming.

Occasionally a little house painted blue rose on two arcades with a single salmon-colored pillar, like a flamingo standing on one leg. Others, the gray stone having lost its coating, only offered the passerby crude stone figures painted over with ochre and grimacing between the arches.

On a rose façade, Angelo noticed russet and green designs showing the ancient Portuguese boats of Columbus floating upon waves quaintly curled. Above in the place of honor glittered monstrances with their hundred rays. What astonished the boy more than these strange details, was the vivacity of the village women gathered before their doors and the care-free and happy ways of bareheaded young girls. How dif-

ferent they were from the grave maidens of Andorra, these daughters of ardent Spain! — and how different from Conchita! Suddenly military music was heard in the distance.

"Soldiers!" cried Paquita, mad with joy.

"Soldiers," murmured Angelo with respect and delight.

He opened wide his eager eyes. His heart beat to the rhythm of the trumpets and drums. Never, no, not even beside the wildest torrents, had the young Andorran heard so splendid a volume of sound!

But look! Here they come clad in light gray, with black leather caps, their hands immovable on the golden radiance of their instruments or frantically beating the drums. They are all alike, the same costume, the same step, the same gestures, the same glance.

Soldiers . . . No inherited tradition predisposed this child of Andorra to grasp the tragic and sacred character of the marching throng. And yet he had to clench his teeth to refrain from joining in the music.

How remote seemed the song of the Andorran cow-bells! Angelo was carried away by this simple martial tune.

His hand in Paquita's, he followed the marching soldiers, quivering with pleasure. The little girl's mother called them in vain. As truly as Columbus had discovered America, Angelo was discovering the world . . . He was as yet unaware of its boundless misery. He merely saw this noble discipline, these songs and these instruments of brass shining in the sun. Exchanging with his young companion glances full of pride and triumph, he entered the Church of San Domingo where soldiers are wont to go to mass and to greet with the blare of trumpets the gesture of the priest calling down the presence of God upon earth.

When this moment came, Angelo was awestruck; shut in with overpowering music in this sombre place, close to the little girl, his hand in hers, Angelo Xiriball felt that the horizon of his life was broadening, just as the horizon had widened before his eyes as he left home. He looked with gratitude

upon the little magician who had led him along new paths. After mass they once more happily followed the military parade. Intoxicated with joy, Angelo sang and Paquita made faces from sheer delight.

Suddenly a storm of cries and invectives fell upon them; for an instant Paquita was blinded with blows: her mother, greatly worried by their disappearance, was wrathfully giving vent to her displeasure.

"Why should you strike her?" said Angelo, red with anger "I led her on. And no one but my father has any right to strike me."

Paquita, screaming, clung to him, and, her green eyes shining with tears and malice, cast grateful glances toward him.

At daybreak, Joan Xiriball mounted his mule with a child wailing in his arms. He wrapped about it a fold of his tapaboquès and set out, laden with misery.

The village was still asleep, rigid at the foot of the leaden mountain, striped by long narrow clouds that floated slowly by like bits of wreckage.

The song of the waters was more mournful than in the light of day; their faint whiteness was still invisible. The red barettina which covered Joan's head, the red in his shawl, the brass trappings and the red pompons of his mule would soon shine in the sun; they were scarcely to be seen in the livid light of early morning.

Joan was meditating as he held the child close and he was suffering. However, without a moment's hesitation, he had obeyed custom, he was sacrificing his flesh and blood to the honor of his house. There had been no struggle within him, but nevertheless he suffered. It would have been good to see this little Coloma, the daughter of Cisquo, growing by his side. Her mother had begged, sobbing, "See that she is registered under that name so that I may know where she is."

Conchita was a good girl, indeed! Perhaps she could begin life anew. Perhaps people would forget her sin, so carefully concealed and denied by the Xiriballs.

The village was sleeping; no one had seen

Joan leave. Upon his return he would say that he had gone to visit his son at the Seminary: who would venture to smile?

As long as he was in the land of Andorra he listened to all the sounds along the way, striving not to awaken the child, for it would have cried. But when he had passed San Julia de Loria, he urged on his mule that he might reach the orphanage at an early hour.

As the sun rose the wind grew harsh and icy. It flung Joan's tapaboquès about him violently and the little girl began to wail anew. He soothed her awkwardly. She kept silent as if already resigned. A few minutes later Joan Xiriball crossed the threshold of the asylum. He left the child with a sum of money and went his way, full of sorrow, yet content; he would no longer think of the past of his race, but of its future.

The Martino Inn with its flat roof faces a small square adorned with a willow-tree and a fountain. The entire ground floor through which one passes to reach the sec-

ond story is used as a stable. Here there is a continual procession of short dark men and of mules with tinkling bells. The latter go straightway to their stalls strewn with fresh straw, and in the evening the men lie down to sleep beside them.

Having disposed of Castagné, Joan went upstairs and ordered soup and wine. As he sat eating, some one said:

"Adios, Xiriball!"

He raised his eyes, but failed to recognize the newcomer.

"You do not know me?"

"No, I do not," he confessed.

The man took off his tam o'shanter, loosened his shawl and went on:

"Yet you have seen me before."

"Yes, I have seen you . . ."

"It was I who helped Cinto de San Julia bring your son home. We had just gotten some tobacco over the border. Your son was killed near the frontier."

"By whom?" asked the father with the brevity that comes from grief.

The man made a vague and prudent ges-

ture, for he was disturbed by the tone of Joan's voice. This Xiriball was no longer a tired traveller chatting as he takes refreshment, but a hunter who has scented game.

The steaming soup of the newcomer was brought on, and interrupted the conversation. When the servant had withdrawn, Xiriball repeated relentlessly:

"By whom?"

"By whom?" repeated the other. "That is the question."

He was a man of forty, already white at the temples. His copper-colored skin was wrinkled around his eyes which were gray, small, and searching. His expression remained young, but his back was bent, and on his hands, those of a very old man, hardened veins stood out.

"Speak," Joan commanded. "I will make it worth your while! Some day, who knows, I might do you a good turn."

The man made a gesture showing his indifference. "Even if you were to offer me a fortune, I couldn't tell you more than I

know. There is one thing, it is true! By mere chance I have come into possession of a note sent to the customs officers that night, warning them to be on the lookout for us."

Xiriball stared at him without understanding, for he was slow of comprehension. The man looked around cautiously. The room was empty except for a servant, who, absorbed in her work, paid no attention to them.

"My idea is this," the man went on in a low voice: "The person who wrote this letter was the murderer, for it was to his interest to bring about the encounter. He had reason to hope that the customs officials would fire at us. That would have saved him the trouble. As no one thought of firing, he shot at the officers to make them believe we meant to attack them, but they fired in the air. Then he made up his mind to aim at your son. The moon was shining, your boy did not hide; he was brave and the other was a coward."

The smuggler spat on the floor, and to

emphasize his disgust rubbed his lips with the back of his hand.

"The letter," said Xiriball simply. While the other was fumbling in his pocket, he drank long draughts of wine from the two-necked jug, for his throat was dry. His hatred was like a brasier lit anew. It consumed him.

"Here it is."

Xiriball read slowly and falteringly:

Men of Andorra will smuggle tobacco into Spain on the night of the fifteenth of March. They will be armed. One of your friends.

"It looks as if it had been written by a child," observed the man, "but that may have been a mere ruse."

"Where have I seen that writing?" murmured Xiriball. "Don't leave me like that, friend. Take some coffee or anything you like. Please do, and listen to me. If you ever need help from the Xiriballs, you have only to knock at their door. Some day, perhaps, when I pass near the grave of my son, thanks to you, I shall no longer have to bow my head in shame."

When they had refreshed themselves, they shook hands and parted. Xiriball folded the paper and put it into his purse. He settled the account for both and left the inn, muttering to himself. What a coincidence! The very moment he had forsaken the child of Cisquo, Fate had put him on the track of his murderer.... How this dead youth had longed to live, and how his memory filled the hearts of those he had left behind...

"Yes, Angelo Xiriball of la Solana, my son. This is not visiting day? But I happened to be passing. Will you please tell the father superior that I am here?"

With bared head, polite but stubborn, the Andorran was so insistent that the doorkeeper finally rose. It was, moreover, the recreation hour; the request of Xiriball might therefore be granted. When he had waited a quarter of an hour, his son ran up to him, full of eagerness tempered with respect.

"You look well," was all Xiriball said.

He felt no need of expressing his joy by kiss or embrace. He looked with mute pride upon the boy whom his vigilance was preserving for the posterity of his race.

"You are not homesick?"

"I was very much so at first. Now I have Paquita."

"Who is Paquita?"

"She is the daughter of the cook, and a fine little girl she is. I love her and I mean to marry her, provided you are willing."

"Did she put that idea into your head?"

"Yes," Angelo confessed, "but I like it too."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Joan Xiriball abruptly as he arose, for he had now seen his son and satisfied his secret longing. "You are no longer a child, but a Xiriball of la Solana. You shall not marry the daughter of a Spanish cook, but a pubilla of your own country. Do you hear?"

The child stiffened in his disappointment and acquiesced with a nod.

"Meanwhile you must work," his father added, more gently. "I, too, am working

for you that no harm may come to you and that you may till our land in peace. Make everybody believe you are going to be a priest," he said, lowering his voice. "There is no other way. I am robbing no one by keeping you here, for I am paying your expenses. So I shall have the right to take you back if you don't feel a call to the priesthood," explained the pious Andorran.

His son's direct reply reassured him. He bent over him and, still skillfully hiding his own tenderness, he said: "Here is a kiss from your mother."

"She is well? And how is Nyerro? And grandfather and grandmother?"

Chatting in this wise they reached the garden gate. Paquita was going to and fro, self-consciously smoothing her hair. But, once more under the sway of his family, Angelo did not look at her.

When they reached the street, he asked: "Did you come to buy a mule, father?"

"Yes," answered Joan, avoiding his son's questioning eye.

From that day forth Angelo dreamed of

Paquita no more than one dreams of any familiar object whose possession is assured. He no longer associated her with his future but he admitted her, leaping and joyous, into the circle of his life. Her affectionate monkey-like little face, her moist hair, her blows, her scratches, her caprices, her play, he accepted it all as a free gift which he was willing to repay with fond friendship.

This naïve affection blossomed under the indulgent eyes of the good priests. A smile exchanged in church, a friendly tap during recreat on hours, from Paquita who, despite regulations, bounded through them like a gray kitten, the sharing of dainties and of ingenuous confidences did not scandalize these Spanish priests, so great is their simplicity of heart, so perfect their understanding of the people.

They realized that it was only thanks to this little girl that the untamed Andorran endured the Seminary. No doubt he would finally be convinced that priesthood was his vocation.

So the children, unrestrained, knew the

gentle joy of an April love, in orchards white with frost and flowers. But when, after two years in the Seminary, Angelo was put into an advanced class, and Paquita was decked out by her mother, eager to have her appear full grown, in dresses reaching to her ankles, the good fathers wished to separate those whom the demon of passion might tempt.

They spoke frankly to the cook and prudently to Angelo. He was astounded, for he was very pure-minded, but promised to obey. From that very day he longed more than ever to be with Paquita.

The girl had long since ceased to make faces. She was thin, sallow, her mouth heavy, her eyes set in dark circles, her hair drawn back in a shining smooth knot, topped with a great fan-shaped comb, her look full of latent passion. She dwelt in this old Spanish town, assailed in vain by changing fashion, and, like its ancient houses, possessed of a style all her own.

Roundabout her, plump young girls clad in tight gowns caricatured French fashions; but Paquita's dresses were inherited from

old ladies whom her mother had served. Fastened around her slender waist their wide skirts swung out into the shape of morning-glories. She had also been given a mantilla of another age, flower-strewn and heavy. It scattered its black roses upon her young head in the shadow of the chapels where Paquita went to pray that she might be worthy of love.

"Let other girls," she reasoned, "spread light veils over their hair, it matters little to me. I know what I gain by remaining Spanish. Strangers admire me, and sometimes, when I pass by, a painter stops me and offers me money to pose for him. Did not one of them say: 'There are two beautiful things here, the cathedral and la Paquita.'"

La Paquita. Almost she was becoming famous. "And yet she is ugly!" observed her companions. But the men did not heed them. When Paquita, escaping her mother's watchful eye, danced to the tune of the mandolins, strangely thin in her wide skirts, her green eyes half closed, the boys gathered

about her. They were still free from jealousy, for not one of them had as yet been chosen.

"Ollé! Ollé!" they cried, and under the spell of Paquita joined the dance.

The good fathers got wind of these doings and requested the cook to send her daughter away. When this order was given, there were such cries, lamentations, and tears in the kitchen that the entire Seminary knew what was going on. Then suddenly Paquita became resigned. It had occurred to her that out from under this close supervision she could see Angelo more freely.

A position was found for her in a family living near the Sègre. At the foot of the wall above which the garden rose, the river, like a blue peacock, spread its brilliant plumage between winding banks faintly green and united by a very old bridge. One of those secret paths often made by the nonchalant steps of lovers along beautiful streams, led through little gray alders. Paquita soon discovered how useful it could be, and with feline cunning watched for the enchanted

moment when Angelo Xiriball would slip into this retreat in answer to her call.

She waited many an hour. The young student had little free time. Of a positive turn of mind, certain that he was not going to take Orders, he kept aloof from all forms of mysticism. But the Sem nary had laid hold of him through its discipline, through everything that appealed to the traditions he had inherited, as well as through the ardent faith that burned within its walls.

To be sure, Angelo Xiriball was not overfervent, but he was a whole-hearted believer, devout and as unsullied as a child: but Paquita, true daughter of ardent Spain, was on the watch. Love consumed her like a fever.

On the evening of the fifteenth of August the seminarians entered the old cathedral, erected, it is said, in the ninth century in a Romanesque style, severe and somewhat crude. It was dark beneath these bare vaults, but altars of gold, virgins of gold, bleeding Christs gleamed in the shadows. Upon an enormous pale blue catafalque the

dead Virgin lay in state in the centre of the edifice, between four lovely angels, life-sized and in varying attitudes. In the cathedral of la Séo, it is a time-honored custom to expose the Virgin in this way during the week of August fifteenth.

The students filed in front of the catafalque, then turned to go out toward the side aisle which leads to the cloister. Hidden behind a pillar, Paquita waited for Angelo and succeeded in slipping a note into his hand. As he was leaving the church, he turned and saw the girl's profile; she was praying and, like the good Spaniard she was, mingled love and religion. Pale in contrast with the black roses of her mantilla, her young face matured by passion was tense as a sail driven by the storm; her eyes glowed with the fervor of her prayers.

"How she prays!" thought Angelo. "I am sure she is thanking the Virgin for having helped her hand me this note. She has no sense of fitness, and she acts like a pagan."

When he had read the note he added:

"Indeed, I shall not go to her rendezvous."

But he went. And in order to go after dark he ventured to do an incredible thing. He took off his cassock, leapt over the garden wall, and ran toward the Sègre. Then by way of a ruse he slackened his step: a useless precaution so far as that goes, for no one had noticed him. So many youths go up and down the river in the evening singing the ballads of old Europe to which Spain lends its rhythm and color!

He was late. But was he not the master called by a slave?

"Paquita! Paquita!" he cried, as he saw the empty path. Crouching behind a bush Paquita was tearing the bitter leaves with her sharp teeth and let him suffer in silence. She, too, suffered, but her suffering was mingled with joy. All that she could see of Angelo in the dim light of evening, his moving silhouette, the fleeting anxiety displayed on his face, convinced her that her artifice had been successful. Never had the young man so longed to see her. Fear that he had been played with, indignation, anger,

cast a shadow upon this longing, but only increased it.

"Paquita, Paquita, I am going." Supple and dark she bounded out, bit Angelo's hand to punish him and offered him her lips quivering with nervous laughter.

Angelo rejoiced in the kiss of Paquita.

Having learned of his escapade, the father superior sent for the young man, who vehemently justified his conduct. "I don't want to be a priest," he declared, "and I want to found a family. What sin have I committed? I have treated this girl with due respect. . . . Why do you require all this renunciation?"

"You will never be a priest, my boy?" faltered the older man sadly.

"Never! For I have not heard the call of God!"

"Why did you come here?"

"In order to obey my father."

"You obey your earthly father and you do not hear the voice of your Father in heaven!" sighed the priest.

He looked at Angelo searchingly, and his

eyes, at length unsealed, saw this young soul as it truly was, vigorous, positive, and straightforward, but far from mystic.

When, a few days later, Joan came to take his son away for his vacation, the young man said to him:

"Let me stay at home from now on. I want to work with you!"

Joan Xiriball meditated an instant; then he said:

"Very well. You are a man. You are eighteen and can protect yourself. And then . . . perhaps it is no longer necessary."

"What is no longer necessary, father?"

Joan hesitated. Should he reveal to his son the danger that threatened him? Had he any right to darken the best years of Angelo's life in order to lay a part of his own burden upon his young shoulders?

His tender heart spoke louder than selfishness and prudence. He said:

"It is nothing. I was thinking of something else. Come back to la Solana. Your mother will be happy."

VII

CONCHITA

AS she wept humbly beneath the blows, there came a sudden silence; the stick ceased to strike. Lifting her head, which she had been holding in her hands, Conchita saw her father stagger. She started to help him: he muttered a cry of anger, mumbled an oath, and fell. His mouth was twisted to one side.

In vain the girl tried to lift him; her bruised shoulders had no strength in them; she was obliged to open the window to call for help.

Only two little children heard her. They ran off in their wooden shoes.

"Mother! Mother!" they cried.

It was still winter. The women kept to the house, plying their needles by the hearth.

The children rushed headlong into the kitchen of their home, for each one wished to be the first to tell the news.

"Mother! Conchita Asnurri is calling for help! There is no one there!"

Their mother dropped her work and the grandmother, who was dozing close to the fire, mumbled:

"Conchita is calling for help? That wretch of a drunkard must be beating her again! Such a good girl!"

"She hasn't always been so good."

"What do you know about it, anyhow?" asked the old woman reprovingly. "Who has ever seen the child, and hasn't she led the most upright life ever since? Where is her equal to be found in the village? Didn't she have a fine chance to marry last summer, and didn't she refuse?"

The mother shook her head.

"Perhaps you are right. But what shall I do? She is calling for help. I am going."

"Ah, that's a different matter. It is better not to meddle with such things as that. The men are the masters. Asnurri is in his own house; he has every right to beat his daughter."

"All the same it's a sad business," said

the younger woman, sighing as she picked up her knitting again.

That is why Conchita had no help from the village. She went to and fro from the motionless body of her father to the window opening upon silence, and, pale to her very lips, she harkened.

At last her ear caught the sound of wooden shoes. The little children were coming back.

"Go find some one! Go back! Go back!" moaned Conchita, stretching out her arms. "I don't dare to leave him alone."

The larger of the two approached. Wrapped in a great dark shawl, one corner of which trailed behind him, with his blue-black hair and his amber-colored skin, he looked for all the world like a blackbird hopping along the road.

"You see, mother said we mustn't meddle in other people's affairs."

Conchita understood only too well, for she knew how cowardly the village was: but this time they had made a mistake. It was the tyrant who needed help. "Cinto! Cinto!

It has nothing to do with me. It is my father, and he is dying. Go tell the Xiriballs. Run!"

Very proud to be the bearers of so serious a message, the children rushed off again. The elder tripped over his dragging shawl, and it was the little one whose thin and triumphant voice announced on the threshold of la Solana:

"Conchita Asnurri wants you to come. Her father is dying."

Maria and Joan rose at once, for they were fond of Conchita. They found her kneeling beside her father, contemplating him with eyes in which fright, grief, and respect were mingled.

To raise his distorted head, she had taken off her shawl and had made a pillow of it. Shivering and benumbed, still anæmic from her sorrowful motherhood, she was on the verge of fainting.

"My poor child!" cried Maria Xiriball, as she ran toward her.

In a glance the Xiriballs realized what had taken place. Asnurri was still clutching the stick.

"He was beating you again, pobreta! The wretch!" said Maria in a voice full of sympathy. "Is there no justice on earth?"

Joan, who had lifted the man in order to stretch him out on the bed, retorted:

"Silence, woman! A man is master in his own house, and therefore is master of his children. That is justice, and justice that must not be interfered with."

Conchita wept and obeyed Joan's orders.

"He is still alive! Go find the doctor, Conchita. We will stay here."

She shook her head. "He may die suddenly and I must be near him. Or he may regain consciousness sufficiently to give me his blessing."

She said to the little children whose eager dark eyes peered in just above the window-sill:

"Run, get the doctor. Run fast."

Once more, full of pride they set out.

Asnurri did not die, but he remained paralyzed. He never again left his bed. At the head of it Conchita was forced to put his

stick, so that he might call her when she was in the garret. Sometimes he punished her by hurling it at her, and she had to hand it back to him to avoid bringing on one of the attacks which were slowly killing him. Henceforth, deprived of all leisure, she could only go to la Solana on the rare days when her brother was at home. Then she would fill her apron with tobacco leaves and fly to work with those she loved.

"You are doing your duty so well that God will surely bless you," promised Maria.

Conchita sighed and said:

"Perhaps He will give me a little corner in paradise near those who are dear to me. I no longer expect any happiness on earth."

At times, filled with pity, Joan went to play cards with the invalid, who invariably inquired about the field over which the two men had quarrelled. It became an obsession with him: before he died he was determined to get together a sum sufficient to buy back this piece of land.

"If I offer you enough, Xiriball, you will

have to sell it to me. The law is on my side." Xiriball agreed. He was not alarmed, for where could the unfortunate paralytic find the money?

Bonaventure Asnurri had been bedridden for several months when his brother fell very ill and sent for Conchita. Both Asnurri and his son were of the opinion that she must answer this appeal:

"I am surprised," the girl said innocently to Maria Xiriball one evening, "that my father should consent to my going every day to look after his brother, he has been on such bad terms with him . . ."

Maria smiled. "Your uncle has no children. He has property, and he may leave everything to your brother. That is what they are hoping for!"

"Now I understand!" Conchita murmured. "My brother will be rich . . . He will marry . . . Some woman will come to preside over our house and I shall have one more person to obey."

"You will marry," protested Maria Xiriball. "You are both good and beautiful,

Conchita. You will have your own fireside."

"Never," said the cigar-maker vehemently.

She was nearly nineteen when her uncle died, leaving her an income hardly worth mentioning. All his property went to the brother of Conchita. When he heard this joyous news, Asnurri clamored for a package of old and venerable documents locked in his cupboard. Then he bade his daughter go for Joan. Xiriball came that evening, somewhat uneasy, foreseeing what the invalid was going to propose. And as a matter of fact he had scarcely crossed the threshold when Asnurri, brandishing a yellowed paper, exclaimed:

"Here is the copy of the contract drawn up in 1685 between the Asnurri as sellers and the Xiriballs as buyers. My son is rich, Xiriball. He is willing to spend a considerable sum to buy back our land! Before the notary, I will offer you four thousand francs. Yes, four thousand francs! Six times what you paid in 1685! There is

nothing stingy about me, Xiriball. I have money and I am ready to spend it! My son is rich. What he needs now is land. He can hire farm-hands. What do you say to that, Xiriball?"

He was wandering a little in his mind and his mouth was twisted. Xiriball cautiously promised him to speak to his father. He saw death hovering over this invalid who in his delirium was still clinging to the yellow parchment. Why should he try to thwart him on the threshold of his tomb? To quarrel over land with the living was but fair, but not with a dying man who was about to return to its bosom.

The next day he explained that old Anton asked for a delay of a few days before coming to discuss the affair himself. But three days later Bonaventure Asnurri was found dead, his head buried in his old papers. Conchita wept over him as though he had loved her and had been her protector.

It was the end of a winter of frost and high wind, wind dry as a fagot, violent and treacherous as a wolf. The wind tore

through the valley in such tumultuous cavalcades that the very stones shook on their foundations, especially the rough masses of slate loosely encrusted, bare as charred beams. They sometimes slid down the flank of the mountain — broad, flat, black, inert. On meeting obstacles they would rear, rebound, and fall, dashed to pieces in the torrents. The sky hung low. At intervals the clouds revealed depths of greenish-blue enamel. The landscape was black and white, charcoal upon white paper. Everything down to the dense flocks of ravens settling upon the snow intensified the contrast. But the figures of the old men, paying one another visits to shorten the days, were russet tipped with red.

Conchita pieced together garments that had belonged to her mother to clothe her body whose perfect lines could scarcely be divined beneath the wide skirts and narrow waists. When her brother refused to buy her the great silken kerchief that she wanted to cover her head, Maria Xiriball gave her one.

"Your brother is without shame!" said Maria. "It is thanks to your self-sacrifice that he is rich and yet he refuses you the bare necessities: as though you didn't have a little income of your own!"

"So little, Maria! Two hundred francs a year. That wouldn't pay for what I eat."

"Nonsense! What about the work you do! I think very little of your brother."

"He means no harm! But you know he is in love with Lolita de Babot; she is stingy and she makes him stingy. And they will soon marry," she concluded in a tone of resignation.

Maria Xiriball said impatiently as she closed the door which the wind had blown open: "It is the hussies who have all the luck. I suppose your brother is going to cultivate his land?"

"The bishop's provost has asked him to remain on duty as mail-carrier until harvest-time. Then he will find some one to take his place. In the mean time, my brother will hire farm-hands."

"So much the better!" replied Maria. "In the mean time he will leave you in peace."

Conchita, one evening alone in her kitchen, heard a knock at her door. "Come in," she said unsuspectingly, but to her astonishment and annoyance she saw Nyerro. Never before had he crossed her threshold.

"May I come in?"

"If you like, but be quick, for I am tired and want to go to bed. You have chosen a strange hour to come. Did your mother send you?"

Without asking him to sit down, she continued to roll her cigars. Nyerro picked one up from the fragrant heap and played with it awkwardly. His glance, now lowered, now raised toward Conchita, was as turbid as the waters of a pond which wild boars have crossed.

"What do you want? Speak!" commanded Conchita, growing uneasy.

Coming close to her, he said as if gasping for breath:

"You are beautiful. I want to marry. I am to be the héreu of the Xiriballs, and you shall be the mistress!"

"That cannot be," cried Conchita, who had turned white. "You, the héreu... In *his* place?"

She could scarcely have explained why this substitution seemed to her so monstrous a thing.

Nyerro began to laugh. Having said all that was essential, he had regained confidence.

"'That cannot be?' That is what Maria Xiriball says! But I know what the old people think. If Angelo is to be a priest, who is to have the arrayo? That is a question that must be settled. And so I want to marry."

Stupefied, Conchita looked upon this youth. She had thought she knew him and suddenly he appeared before her, calculating, sly, violent, and lustful. The reason for his coming was now plain. Maria had been so imprudent as to say one evening in Nyerro's presence that Angelo did not feel

a call to the priesthood and was to return to la Solana. If Nyerro should marry before the end of the year, he would force his father to make a decision regarding the inheritance. Ah, he was no fool! What a redoubtable adversary for Angelo!

Drawing herself up, with flaming eyes, Conchita cried:

"I shall never marry you! Neither you nor any one else! Cisquo is dead, and you have not so much as shed a tear! Have I not seen you laugh as you passed by the cemetery? Wicked brother! Go your way! I detest you!"

He sneered, and, exasperated by grief, she added: "You are both stupid and ugly, while he . . . "

She did not finish . . . Two arms of iron imprisoned her; livid, cold lips crushed hers; she succeeded in lowering her head to avoid the odious kiss. Her supple body bent like a young tree beneath the wind. In terror she caught a glimpse of a frightful face, clenched teeth, a red glance between red lids; wild desire, like that of the wolf for its

mate, transformed this taciturn being into a madman.

"You shall be mine!" he repeated in a hoarse voice.

Conchita's kerchief slipped down upon her shoulders, her black braids loosened. Her face framed in shining coils was so tragically beautiful that the wretch in agony implored:

"Do not send me away! I shall marry you! You shall be rich . . ."

He was crazed, she knew, with passion. Biting his wrist, she freed herself and ran toward the door.

"You are contemptible and you disgust me!" she cried, as she turned, ready to flee from her own threshold.

"You have not always been so virtuous!" he sneered.

"Be silent!" said the girl sharply, knotting up her disordered hair. "She who has loved Cisquo cannot love you."

Coming closer he gulped out: "I shall kill you . . ."

She shrugged her shoulders.

He went on, wild-eyed: "I shall kill you, *too*."

In a flash the atrocious truth was clear to Conchita. The night of the crime Nyerro had been hunting izards with his gun . . . Tall and thin, the old woman of Santa Coloma had said. It was he!

"You," stammered Conchita, seizing him by the shoulder, for she was no longer afraid. Now it was he who, frightened by his imprudent confession, wished to flee.

But he soon controlled himself and from the doorway said tauntingly: "Hold your peace! You are mad and every one knows it. Say anything you want; no one will believe you. Moreover," he concluded, "you wont say anything at all. I know you. You think too much of the honor of the Xiriballs. Remain a servant for the rest of your days. I was much too good to propose anything else! You are mad, indeed. Farewell!"

Thereafter, partly in a spirit of vengeance and partly out of prudence, he spread dis-

agreeable tales about Conchita. Sometimes they reflected upon her sanity, sometimes upon her virtue. He said little, but he laughed and shrugged his shoulders at the proper moment. Once more Conchita encountered the mockery and the desire of men as she passed by. Her heart heavy with her tragic secret, she went every morning to cultivate the newly inherited land and supervised her brother's servants. Yet she was the humblest servant of them all. From time to time Lola de Babot, as she saw her go by carrying lunch to the workers, gave her condescending advice regarding the land. She looked upon her scornfully because of Nyerro's slandering tales.

But Conchita's goodness was rewarded. One morning, as she was returning from the wash-house with two young neighbors, she met the priest, who said:

"The Holy Week procession is to take place next Thursday. I want it to be beautiful and to be followed by as many of my parishioners as possible. In other words, Concepcion Asnurri, I count on you."

She replied, blushing with emotion, that she would not fail to take part in this pious ceremony.

"Of course, you will not fail," the priest went on. "But I wish you to be one of the Daughters of Sorrow who walk behind the Holy Sacrament."

And, interrupting with a gesture Conchita's impulsive protestation, he concluded:

"For the last two years the care of your father has prevented you from being present at the meetings of the parish. This reason no longer exists, and now I count upon you, my child. Take your place once more among the girls of the village. Not one of them is more deserving than you."

Conchita thought she must be dreaming. She stammered an excuse. Had the priest forgotten the confession of her sin? And had her companions forgotten the gossip whispered by the young men she had spurned?

So she took her place among the girls of the village with a wreath of ivy and blue berries about her pensive brow.

Maria Xiriball said in a tone of satisfaction: "That is where she belongs. She is such a good girl. Is she not the most beautiful and the bravest of all Andorra? After caring for two old men, as she has, doesn't she now help me look after my mother-in-law who cannot stir from her bed? I tell you the girl is a saint."

Conchita went forward slowly, her eyes on the ground, her hands roughened by hard work bearing one of the sacred emblems. She was going forward in the estimation of the village folk as well. Joan Xiriball, who loved her like a father from the depth of his simple heart, was proud for Conchita. A few weeks later he said to her rather awkwardly one evening as she was leaving old Lola whose bed-linen she had just changed:

"You have long been the servant of your own family and now you have become the servant of the Xiriballs. How can I reward you, my girl?"

They were standing on the threshold of the room and old Lola was mumbling her Ave.

"Supposing I were to ask for wages?" Conchita said, smiling.

He too smiled, with his eyes only, as he often did. "I would give them to you!"

She grew grave again. "I need nothing. But will you take whatever you would have given me to la Séo for the child? I will put with it a hundred francs of my own from my little income. The other hundred will serve to have masses said for Cisquo. Will you, Xiriball?"

He merely nodded, for he must not let a woman hear the break in his voice and know that he had been close to weeping.

Three months later Angelo came back to la Solana.

VIII

ANGELO XIRIBALL

"COME, harvesters! Put your heart in your work!"

Old Anton hobbled up and seated himself by the edge of the meadow. His son Joan, his two grandsons, and a day-laborer were mowing there together. The four scythes had caught the light of the morning and the long stems fell upon the blades softly, with a gentle rustling sound, like little waves upon the strand. It had rained the night before, which lightened the mowers' task; the scythes cut into the stalks more easily because they were wet. Old Anton congratulated himself on this perfect morning for mowing as he took a pinch of snuff.

In truth the Xiriballs were good workers; Joan and Nyerro had not their equal. But Angelo, thought Anton, as he looked at him with half-closed eyes, still felt himself hampered by the cassock he had been wearing. Far from husbanding his strength, he under-

took too much. He was tiring himself and perspired heavily.

He was thinking also that no one but Nyerro would make a fit héreu. Angelo would marry a girl with a good dowry and his family would give him money, a small sum of money. Then every one would be satisfied.

As the sun, lingering for a moment behind the mountain to the east, came forth and spread its beautiful rose-colored peacock's tail, a damp heat penetrated the old man's body. The grass about him had grown dry and offered that pleasant rest deserved by good workmen when their bodies are weary. And Anton lay down and fell asleep.

Before him, the little sea of ripe wheat was slowly falling, as the rhythmic waves increased; shorn of its fleece, the earth here and there showed through the fresh stubble in reddish patches. An odor at once acrid and sweet floated over the meadow, and gave way to woodland smells borne along by the wind.

Upright, facing the breeze, Angelo Xiriball stood breathing in the mountain air:

"You are tired, rest a bit!" was Nyerro's advice.

He shook his head, the strong, finely shaped head of a well-born mountaineer. The pallor breathed upon him by classroom and gloomy chapels still overspread his face: a habit of restraint and self-control often led him to veil the fire of his glance by dropping his eyelids.

"When he raises them," Conchita had once confided in her old friend, "they are full of sunlight as were the eyes of Cisquo."

Angelo looked so much like his brother that when he had appeared before her suddenly, the evening of his return, Conchita uttered a stifled cry, then burst into tears. Nyerro whispered in his grandfather's ear: "You see, don't you, she is going mad, poor girl." Astounded, Angelo cast a gentle brotherly look upon Conchita.

The morning was beautiful. Conchita and Maria Xiriball were bringing lunch for the mowers. The girl was carrying a

basket balanced on her black head. This burden obliged her to hold herself very straight, and to walk smoothly and rhythmically. She called up a vision of a classic dancer with her simple, stately step.

"Go take their baskets, my son," said Joan to Angelo. "Put down your scythe. You are tired, and you are out of practice. That is all. You might as well acknowledge it."

Angelo ran to take the heavy basket from Conchita's head and for a moment their faces were close together. But Conchita thought of Cisquo and Angelo thought of the feline Paquita.

Anton awoke and fell to watching the swift scythe of Nyerro and heard him cry out that they must let him finish the swath he had begun. He would eat his lunch later. He seemed to be challenging his father to a test of endurance.

"My Nyerro is a fine mower!" muttered Anton, seeking some sign of approbation in the eyes of Conchita who, full of hatred, turned her head aside. The old

man was at first surprised, but then recalled his favorite's oft-repeated sentence: "She is mad!" And he shook his white head.

They ate their lunch slowly and laboriously, passing about the bread which each one cut with his pocket knife and the wine which they drank from the two-necked jug. The fragrance of a thick soup called "escudilla," filled the air, arousing the appetite of Nyerro's greedy dog. When Nyerro had his lunch, he threw the famished animal the usual stale crusts from his pocket. Conchita had left and Maria was waiting to carry off the leavings of the meal.

When they had finished eating, Nyerro and the laborer stretched out beside Anton for a moment's sleep. Maria went her way, Angelo pulled a book out of his pocket and began to read, and Joan, whose curiosity was aroused, watched him with interest. He saw such happy lights passing over his son's expressive face that he was seized with a desire to know what companions

Angelo had chosen. He said somewhat timidly:

"What are you reading?"

The boy offered to read to him. Joan nodded acquiescence. Gathering himself together, his back bent, his calloused hands clasped, and his eyes fixed upon his son's lips, he applied himself to the hard task of understanding.

Hard? Not so hard, after all. It was the story of a shepherd king who, upon his return from a long and perilous journey, presented himself in disguise to the faithful queen who was spinning and dreaming of him.

The story was so profoundly human that the stern Andorran recognized himself in the king of Ithaca. He now strove to follow with his own eyes the beautiful tale as it was written in the book.

"How fast you go!" he sighed at length. "They have certainly made a great scholar of you over yonder. As for me, I have forgotten all I ever knew."

"I will have you read a little every

evening!" the boy replied. "Then I'll lend you the book, father. You shall see how beautiful it is. You will feel as if you were on a long voyage yourself!"

Voyage, magic word! From that day on, nearly every evening after the lamps were lit Angelo had his father read. Joan's great fingers, blunted with hard work, passed under the lines, rapidly when the reading was rapid, at times slowly, as if caught in the underbrush of syllables.

"Those people are like us!" was Joan's astonished comment. "More like us mountaineers than city folk!" — A profound observation that set Angelo to thinking.

Maria Xiriball looked proudly at her son as she passed her coarse darning needles to Conchita to have them threaded.

But Anton, who was bored, would say at the stroke of ten: "Enough time wasted! To-morrow we must be at work by four o'clock."

There had always been a wall between him and Joan. There was another between Angelo and his father, but it was a wall

with flower-grown openings through which their souls could meet.

Nature had in some miraculous fashion lighted in the son of Anton the lovely star of gentleness, in his grandson this star was still more luminous. In the darkness of this strong primitive race a superior type of man was coming into being.

Maria Xiriball used to say with naïve humility as she looked upon Angelo: "How did I ever come by a son like this?"

She so admired him that it never occurred to her to compare him to his father, the taciturn and melancholy Joan, who had always spoken to her as a master. Through her son she was learning to understand true love, love free from passion, a flowering of the soul, a clear radiancy. She was already jealous of the maiden Angelo would one day love.

Life at la Solana was transformed by the young man's presence. Work had become more joyous and leisure hours were filled with books and youth.

"Those Xiriballs are getting to be gentlemen!" some one observed.

It was the rapid rising of a race to its highest level. Old Anton watched this evolution with some dissatisfaction. He would have had it manifest itself otherwise, not in the direction of learning, but rather of riches. The intimacy between father and son, to which Nyerro was constantly calling his attention, troubled him. He seemed, on the other hand, to take an almost spiteful pleasure in Nyerro's crude stupidity.

There came about a break in the household such as often results when one member of the family forges ahead before the envious eyes of the others. When Angelo went to la Séo d'Urgel with his father to buy or sell mules, Maria and Conchita noticed his unusual eagerness to go. Conchita suggested the possibility of a secret love affair.

His mother replied confidently: "Be that as it may, he is sure to have made a wise choice. We shall see."

They did not have to wait long. The fête-days of the various Andorran villages followed one another in quick succession. After that of Andorra-the-Old came that of

Encamp, to which all Andorra flocked. Angelo went with his friends in a tartane.

The tartane is a two-wheeled vehicle with an air-tight tarpaulin top. The travellers sit on two long seats padded with sheepskin, their feet resting not on a solid floor, but on a net of heavy cord stretched tight and letting in all the blasts that blow. On the front of the tartane, extending out on either side and as it were framing in the hind-quarters of the mule, are two little folding seats reserved for the driver, who sits now on one, now on the other, his legs dangling almost to the roadway.

Angelo took the reins and urged on the mule.

"Ya! Ya! Outsiqué!"

Along the gentle slopes, the faithful beast trotted, but at the top of a steep incline it would moderate its pace and descend cautiously.

Filled with youth the tartane rang with song. At the end of an hour and a half, the church of Encamp came in sight and five minutes later the village itself.

The young men got out to hear the last few minutes of vespers. The eldest of the band stayed with the tartane and the mule. Vespers! Here were all the pretty maidens of Encamp piously gathered together before the dance. The young men admired them as if they were so many flowers in a garden.

A truly beautiful ceremony. A priest clad in gold officiated before the ancient altar, gilded like himself, beneath the eyes of an unforgettable Madonna of carved wood. The Madonna's face, convulsed with grief, seemed to turn toward the outstretched, imploring hands before her.

In the gallery psalm followed psalm, interspersed with gay tango tunes which the musicians dutifully offered to the Lord before the hour of the dance.

Women and maidens in mantillas, kneeling on the ground, filled three quarters of the little church; very quietly the men and boys huddled together about the entrance.

At the sound of the last Amen they joyfully took the road leading to the village.

Tartanes and a few Spanish automobiles were already filling the streets. Somewhat apart from his comrades, Angelo amused himself watching the newcomers when a sudden and violent emotion drove the blood to his face. From a mule aquiver with red pompons stepped down Paquita clothed in black. What a beautiful girl! What a beautiful dress! What a beautiful mantilla all strewn with black roses!

Thus spake the eyes of the men. Angelo was stirred to the depths of his soul. Paquita had seen him and had turned her back upon him. Then of a sudden leaving her mule to her companions, she took a step toward him.

She danced rather than walked and sang rather than spoke; in one glance she offered up all the madness of her youth. Her feline slenderness, her green eyes slanting toward the temples, her lips too thick and too red, the dash of color on her cheeks, made her, in the eyes of the Andorrans, akin to those creatures of pleasure whom tradition bars from Andorra, and to breathe

whose heavy perfumes men but rarely cross the frontier.

Paquita walked along on her high patent-leather heels, and her full-skirted dress of black silk rustled about her in the changing breeze.

"Buenos tardes, Angelo!"

"Paquita . . . you . . . here!"

She laughed . . . "Does the village belong to you? And why, pray, should I not come here? Friends brought me with them from la Séo."

She tilted her chin toward the young men who had been riding by her side. One of them, foppish and fashionable, might well be a bourgeois from Barcelona.

"The music!" cried Paquita, who eagerly offered her whole self to the rhythm and her body to the arms of the already vanquished Angelo.

Four musicians seated on a platform festooned with boxwood were playing a Spanish tango, joyous and soft. Couples were already swaying back and forth in the dusty street, somewhat impeded by little

groups of children. The smallest of these children, yellow-clad like chickens, were running about, rolling under the feet of the dancers, laughing and crying: the older ones, those from seven to ten, were trying the tango steps with grave eyes that followed the dance.

Amidst girls in light-colored gowns, scanty as was the fashion, Paquita, sombre-hued and sleek as a swallow, drew all eyes to herself. Every one noticed that for the second dance, the dance of the Rose, Angelo spontaneously offered her the symbolic flower, while for the dance of the Pansy, Paquita bought for Angelo the flower that made him her partner once more. There was, according to custom, an exchange of various gifts, each representing an invitation or an acceptance.

"Do you know what happened?" said Paquita, as she danced on gracefully. "I planned to call for you as we passed through Andorra . . . and I asked the way to your house. Before the door stood an ugly young man. I told him I wished to see the

eldest Xiriball. With a queer look in his eyes he answered that it was he! But I laughed, for I didn't believe him for a moment. Then a girl — rather pretty, I must say — came up. The young man called her Conchita. She told me you were at Encamp, and I went on. When I came to the end of the street, I looked back and I saw the eyes of the young man and the young woman fixed upon me. The young man had an ill-natured look and the young woman was evidently suffering. Yes, she was suffering," the Spanish girl repeated maliciously. "That made her look old and ugly. Tell me who is this girl who presumes to love you?"

He shrugged his shoulders and besought Paquita to talk of something else.

Grown docile, she went on, clinging as close to him as the stream does to the rock. "You are right. That doesn't matter — nothing matters but you and me. Nothing else interests me. Do you want a proof of it, Angelo mine? Look at that fine fellow who came with me from la Séo. He is a

singer from Barcelona, an artist. He is madly in love with me, and yet you see I haven't given him a single dance! He suffers as your Conchita does. And so much the worse for them, for there is nothing but you and me, you and me . . ."

She put into these three words intonations that stirred Angelo like a caress. This supple body, at once so heavy and so light, suddenly tempted him as a spring tempts a traveller crossing the desert. A strange fear took hold of him because of the glances the village people cast upon them. A little awkwardly he invited Paquita to go into the inn for refreshment.

There in the great room confusion reigned. The air was as full of flies as a plum cake of Corinthian raisins. The innkeeper, armed with an "espanto-mosquès" — a long reed topped off with innumerable streamers of pink tissue paper — was driving them away from a table where the most distinguished guests were dining. Rice à la Valenciennes was steaming, very yellow in a blue platter, and rancio sparkled in the

glasses. All eyes turned toward Paquita. Her archaic and charming costume, which merely amused the mountaineers, found favor in the sight of town-dwellers. From the depths of her pocket the girl drew forth a fan, and so completed the picture. She drank an absinthe with Angelo and talked of trifles, taking pleasure in tormenting him.

When it was time to leave, she asked the youth from Barcelona to take Angelo's place in the tartane, and to let him ride his mule as far as Andorra.

"I'll make it up to you somehow," she promised. "I have a serious reason for asking you to do it."

Captivated as he was, the young man submitted. So Angelo and Paquita set out side by side beneath a starry sky along the banks of a river, the white foam of the water glistening over masses of submerged marble.

Seated on the stone bench, Maria and Conchita were talking idly as they waited for Angelo.

"Maria, did you hear the answer Nyerro gave that girl? 'I am the eldest.' What is more, he believes it! He is standing in the way of your son. But he cannot be the heir. . . . It is out of the question! Do straighten things out as soon as you can. Marry off Angelo; he is his father's favorite. He will be glad to declare him his heir."

"He is so young, Conchita!"

"But supposing Nyerro takes his place? He would be capable of marrying for that very purpose. He is so ambitious and so wicked, Maria! Rather than see him héreu, I . . . "

Maria gave her a questioning look. Conchita's violent outburst dazed her. But, regaining her self-possession, the girl went on:

"Don't mind me, Maria. When I think of him who is gone, I scarcely know what I am saying. Surely there are some things God does not allow to happen. If he does, the dead are dead for all time and can never protect themselves. If that is so, what the Catechism teaches is a lie, isn't it?"

Maria reminded her gently that the Catechism had nothing to say regarding the power of the dead. Conchita shook her head stubbornly and returned home to wait upon her brother and his friends.

IX

LA BEPPA

AT the Spanish-Andorran frontier, near a place called le Puig, there was a hut so wretched that in any other country wars and popular uprisings would have long since razed it to the ground.

There, on the contrary, the stones of its walls had sunk down and hardened. They had become a part of the mountain-side and defied the ravages of time. But under the thatch, renewed from time to time, the rafters of the roof were disintegrating beneath the weight of the centuries.

Within them there was a continual sound as of sand falling in an hourglass, the incessant faint murmur of insects. As the yellow dust fell from the thousand holes bored by the termites, the rafters were little by little growing hollow. They were scarred with wrinkles, like a human face.

Passing centuries had dried their tears of resin, but they still moaned in the wind and

at times seemed to reprove the imprudent souls who dwelt below them.

At present the inhabitants of the hut were a woman and her four children, or rather a female and her four young, for the woman was a wild creature, and the beings to whom she had given birth, timid, sly, and sharp-toothed little animals.

The two older ones, at the ages of six and seven, already knew the joy of swaying in the top of tall trees and the intoxicating dizziness of scaling heights. The two others rolled about in the thickets like rabbits. To call them, their mother uttered an inarticulate cry which they repeated gleefully, for they knew it meant feeding time. At all other hours, roaming through the forest, now calm, now rocked with gales, the four children passed their uncertain days in the heather, humming like wild bees.

Civilized beings talk of understanding Nature and loving Nature. But they speak of something as unknown to them as the lost paradise. These four children

loved it because, born of it, shaped from primitive clay, they had taken root in Nature and would have died had they been transplanted.

No one knew whence la Beppa came. A few years before, a child in her arms, she had come to settle down in Andorra, not far from la Massana. She was unaware of the diabolical irony of her dwelling close to a chapel built to the glory of Saint Anthony who is famed for his kindly care of mule-drivers.

So it happened that some knelt before the grating and offered devout prayer to Saint Anthony, while others, tormented by the call of the flesh, made their way to the purveyor of love.

This state of affairs lasted but one year. The Andorran authorities, ever mindful of the morals of the people, drove off la Beppa and her children. For twenty pesetas a year she rented her old hut on the Spanish frontier and her clientèle changed. Unless they had some serious purpose in mind, mule-drivers did not venture upon that steep, barren

slope where fir-trees send up their black flames amidst the whiteness of the waters. Only smugglers were wont to take this difficult, out-of-the-way road. La Beppa welcomed them as did the mountain itself.

Dumb from birth, she used gestures and guttural cries to express her childish thoughts. Her children cried out and gesticulated as she did, though no one of them was dumb. Unable to speak since no one ever spoke in their presence, they merely sang the songs they heard the smugglers sing. These urchins of four, six, and seven who could ask for bread only with gestures, sang of love and the woes of lovers to the passionate airs of Spanish songs.

They learned from Nature, their second mother, a whole language borrowed from the wind, from the sighing of the wind in the pines, borrowed from the waters, from swift-flowing waters, from falling waters; from waters slumbering in lakes and waters crashing together, borrowed from the yelping of foxes, the bleating of izards, the hoot-

ing of owls, the tapping of wood-peckers, borrowed from all God's creatures. Being sound and happy, they loved their wild mother, for she was kind to them.

One day when a chance visitor who was drunk had jostled the youngest child, la Beppa had clawed his face till the blood came and flung him out of the door with superhuman strength, uttering frightful cries all the while.

Every week she took herself to San Julia de Loria to buy bread; sometimes she pushed on to la Séo to procure clothing. And in bad weather she locked her four children in the tumble-down hut with a tureen full of soup and a bowl of milk.

She set out alone to mingle with mankind, and no one greeted her because of her degradation.

Disaster came and all was changed for her. The unspeakable thing took place one April day, when the still uncertain weather wavered between rigor and mildness. The branches crackled as they thawed. The sun had risen early, but was soon buried

SHE SET OUT ALONE TO MINGLE WITH MANKIND

beneath storm clouds marshalled by the wind. The whole face of the mountain changed: livid lights, dark shadows, outlines of rocks clammy in the low-hanging mist, all these forerunners of foul weather replaced the radiance of a frosty, rosy dawn. La Beppa cried: "Hou! Rohouou!" as she looked at the sky. Then she pointed out the soup tureen to her eldest, already awake, mended the fire, wrapped herself in a heavy cloak of fustian, and kissed the younger children who still lay sleeping. Finally she locked the door and set off for town.

It was good to see her walking with firm step across slopes scarcely cut by a hidden path, over the slanting rocks that barred the way, along ravines shimmering with water: all this in a raging wind that made the black-robed pines kneel like women at prayer.

La Beppa walked rapidly that she might return before nightfall: her hut had disappeared behind a spur of the mountain by the time she reached the village called

Arcabell. She was at once made aware of the presence of man by the stones hurled at her. Her cape, which the wind filled out like a leather water-bottle, protected her from injury. The stones struck her with a muffled sound. She shook them off unmoved as an ox does flies. This was the reception she expected. Why should she complain? It would be better to quicken her step so she might cover in an hour and a half the eleven kilometres that lay between her and la Séo d'Urgel. There she could satisfy her hunger with a raw onion and be back with her children before nightfall.

This she did, and by sunset she reached Arcabell with a heavy bundle of garments and provisions on her back. She met groups of boys and instinctively bent over for fear of stones. But an unheard-of thing occurred: the young rascals regarded her with a sort of awkward respect, one of them even put his hand to his tam o' shanter as if to greet her and then ran away.

La Beppa stopped, moved by the half greeting as she might have been by a miracle

such as the Madonna lets fall from her blessed right hand. As if to collect her troubled thoughts, she seated herself for an instant on a stone by the roadside. Suddenly the children reappeared and, standing around her in a silent circle, they stared at la Beppa.

"She is deaf and dumb," said one of them. "How can we make her understand?"

They did not know how much the heart of a mother can divine, savage though she be. Alarmed by the evident excitement of the children, la Beppa rose, gray beneath her tan, and giving a hoarse cry she pointed in the direction of the hut.

All the children shouted: "Yes! Yes! Yes!" And they hastened after her.

She ran, she flew along under her burden, misshapen as a gnome and swift as the wind. Her cloak of fustian which she had left open beat against her sides, making two great tawny wings. She was an eagle swooping down with wild cries upon its devastated aerie.

Hoarse sounds came from her gray lips; the freckles on her gray skin stood out clearly, and her eyes, smarting from the cold, were rimmed with red. She peered through the yellow locks that had escaped from her kerchief.

All out of breath, the children scattered along the road. They could not keep pace with this whirlwind of grief, and stood waiting for the villagers who were by now hastening up.

It was an assault upon the mountain made by men under the leadership of a winged phantom, an assault for the taking of the hut. In a quarter of an hour la Beppa had reached her house.

Her house . . .?

Was it her home — that blackened heap of ruins from which a great charred arm rose high against the sky?

Shattered by the tempest, the roof had sunk down upon the cradles and upon the fire. Fed by all the timbers, the flames had consumed the inside of the house. They had consumed it, left it clean and hollow as

an old bone. Merciful God! What trace remained of la Beppa's children?

A priest was walking back and forth before the ruins, murmuring prayers. He waited for the mother, to tell her of God and the paradise of little children. At her unearthly shriek, he turned, went toward her, and attempted to stop her, but with a wild bound, brushing aside the holy man, she leapt in amongst the ashes, made of the flesh of her flesh.

She turned them over, she held them tight in her hands, she pressed them to her lips. The village people were weeping. Later, in the village, they told how it required several of them to drag her away from the ruins, which she kept stirring like a famished jackal, with her feet, with her hands, with her head, uttering hollow cries.

Her screams were borne afar on the wind. So do mighty waters roll along rocks still mightier than they. These screams were heard by the old people who had remained at home, and one and all they crossed themselves, saying: "She is a great sinner, but

her punishment exceeds her sin, for she was a good mother."

That evening the mothers in the village contended for the sad honor of sheltering the purveyor of love.

Thus she lost by fire the four children born of her sin and she became an old woman, unmoved by the lust of men. Moreover, none of those who knew what had taken place dared seek her out. Surrounded by pity and a feeling akin to respect, she went about begging the bread which she no longer sought from love.

One evening when his longing for Conchita left him no peace, Nyerro Xiriball, who had been in the habit of visiting la Beppa, set out for Arcabell. There some one told him of the calamity that had befallen la Beppa, but in his miserable heart he did not dream that the purveyor of love had become an old woman through renunciation. He knocked at her door and entered forthwith. La Beppa, crouching before the fire, turned upon him the inflamed eyes of a beast cowering in terror in the depth of its den.

She was clad in black rags. The cradles had disappeared and the room seemed huge and empty. Out of pity the men of Arcabell had rebuilt the roof and laid a floor. Everything was clean and bare. Despite the gaze of this childless mother, Nyerro took another step forward and displayed a coin.

When she saw him draw near, la Beppa leapt up, howled like a wolf, and bit his neck.

Then with more than human strength she lifted him and flung him out the door. There he spent a part of the night, now insulting, now imploring her, and never a spark of respect or pity kindled in his wretched heart. La Beppa thought to herself: "Who is this man that he should seek love from a woman whose four children are dead? — Love that creates not only the children of men, but much sorrow as well: love that ends under the sod. I am the oldest of the old and this man is viler than all others. Curses upon him!"

She was almost happy in resisting his sav-

age desire, for she already cared for the respect of the village.

All these things are related solely to throw light upon the contemptible soul of Nyerro Xiriball.

Henceforth la Beppa lead a chaste life and begged her daily bread. Then some one pointed out to her the Andorran frontier beyond which a race of shepherds practice divine charity quietly and simply. It had been discovered that the father of la Beppa was an Andorran and that she was therefore entitled to the assistance granted to the poor of that country.

She understood and, preceded by the legend of her life, purified by grief, she returned one evening to the hut where her first child had been born.

Four beams formed a framework filled with dry leaves: that was the bed. Its cracks thick with spiders' webs, the window gave forth a gentle sound of torn silk when it was opened. Two bats, hanging asleep with folded wings from a rafter, suddenly awoke and began to flit about. To frighten them

la Beppa uttered her guttural cries. But in vain. The bats, maddened and blinded by the red light of the setting sun, did not leave the hut.

Then a gleam of sympathy lit up the eyes of la Beppa; she crouched upon the sod floor and forgot the bats. She also allowed a hedgehog, a mass of spines, to lie beneath her pallet, and alone with these creatures of God she gave herself over to her memories.

Miraculously fed, as are the hermits in the desert and the simple folk who have utter faith in Providence, twice a week she received the bread and meat the Comu sent her by a young boy of Andorra.

As the hour drew near when this child, who was of the same age as her eldest, was wont to climb up over the loose pile of granite that lay beneath her hut, la Beppa with eyes full of mad dreams eagerly awaited his coming.

X

THE REVELATION

"THERE will be three of us for dinner!" said young Asnurri. "Get something ready for us!"

Conchita looked at him in astonishment.

He went on by way of explanation: "Two friends of mine from la Séo are passing through the village. Their mules are in our stable. I did not want them to go to the inn for dinner, for they are good comrades of mine."

"The Péguéra brothers?" said Conchita, somewhat disturbed.

He replied impatiently: "I know you don't like them, but you will have to put up with them. Who is master here, anyhow? I am planning to marry by All Saints' Day and you would do well to marry too."

He concluded in a cold tone of authority and with a cruel allusion to Conchita's past: "The older Péguéra is willing to marry you."

The wind of fear blew across the girl's face.

Péguéra . . . that rough mule-driver from whom she had had to defend herself one evening on the road to la Séo . . . Péguéra that rake, that drunkard whose wife had died of grief . . .

Yet Conchita dared not say these things aloud because of her brother's friendship for the Péguéras. She merely stammered: "He . . . he is Spanish. I should no longer be of Andorra!"

"Indeed, you would not," said the young man sarcastically. "You are not a pubilla, so far as I know, so why should your husband become an Andorran. A younger child and penniless, you will naturally go with Péguéra. It is no small thing that he is willing to take you without a cent of dowry."

Leaning back in his chair, his hands in his pockets, Benvenuto Asnurri raised toward the ceiling his flat and crafty face. Not even deigning to note the effect of his words upon Conchita, he was watching with half-closed

eyes the smoke from his cigar. The sound of a stifled sob merely made him shrug his shoulders. Lola de Babot had turned this weak creature into a cruel man. He rose, for the Péguéras were tapping at the window.

"Buenos tardes, Péguéra!"

The guests entered.

A confident smile on his thick Saracen lips, the mule-driver contemplated the beautiful Andorran. Bending over the fire she had revived, she was now in the shadow, now luminous, as the flames rose and fell with the regularity of breathing. The harmonious outlines of this beautiful bent body, the gentle stirring of her breast beneath her tight bodice held Péguéra's attention, but he preserved an appearance of respect, for he was a guest in an Andorran home.

Asnurri himself, worthless though he seemed at times, would not have taken it lightly had Péguéra attempted the least familiarity with his sister. So the three men drew up to the table without further cere-

mony. Conchita served them the traditional escudilla, fried eggs, and sour cheese. The three ate with the slow and patient avidity of mountaineers. The only luxury upon this bare table, amber-colored rancio, sparkled in the spotless porro. Conchita kept filling it as she nibbled at what remained of the meal, and her tears slowly fell upon the dry bread.

As he cut his cheese, the elder Péguéra said bluntly:

"You and I are good friends, Asnurri; and you know I would like to become your brother. Have you spoken to Concepcion?"

In the semi-darkness that lay outside the circle of light the lamp shed upon the table, Conchita stood petrified. Her haggard eyes were fixed upon the mule-driver but she saw only the image of Cisquo.

Endure the love of this Péguéra! Never! Between him and her rebellious flesh lay the possibilities of flight and death, unless a miracle . . .

Conchita's lips moved in prayer as Asnurri said laughingly:

"Do you know what bothers her, Péguéra? It's the idea of becoming Spanish!"

The three men burst into loud laughter. The elder Péguéra slapped his thighs, and the younger was rocked with mirth as a sailor is by a tempest. The more controlled Asnurri coupled his hilarity with a surly look in the direction of Conchita.

Finally Péguéra said: "If your sister were a pubilla, I would be only too glad to become an Andorran!"

"Well you might!" muttered the younger; "no military service, few taxes, never a war. But think of it!"

"But that is just the trouble!" interrupted young Asnurri. "Concepcion will never be a pubilla, for I've no intention of dying, even if the devil himself is so disposed!"

"Be still," sighed Conchita. "You mustn't say such things."

Her brother shrugged his shoulders. "I fear neither God nor devil. Come, friends, let's round out our evening at the inn and talk things over. You can speak to my sister

again, Péguéra, the next time you come this way."

They set forth to settle the fate of Conchita. When she found herself alone, the girl fell to meditating, then with a brusque movement she seized a small mirror hanging on the wall and drew near the lamp.

Whence came the passion of men which was continually pursuing her, that of Nyerro, of Péguéra, of others whose names she repeated to herself with disgust.

Was she not old before her time, faded by the sorrow love had brought her? Her eyes lost in the greenish surface of the mirror, Conchita examined her face and finding herself beautiful, wept long and bitterly as she knelt before the dying fire.

Toward the end of the summer the betrothed of Asnurri fell ill and the wedding was postponed. Conchita was left in peace, for her brother still had need of a servant. He had given up his work as a carrier and was now tilling the soil with all his strength. This rake, this hard drinker, since he had

come into possession of land, had heeded its call and for its sake was making a man of himself.

A born miser, his miserly ways were curing his passion for drink. Now there was no hard labor he would not undertake to earn a little more money.

That year snow fell abundantly on the very threshold of autumn, and by December the mountain passes were blocked. The Puymorens Pass, with its altitude of nearly two thousand metres, was covered with two and a half metres of snow, so said the carrier. Embalire Pass, considerably higher, would be shut off for long months. There were no means of communication with France by way of Ariège. After three months of waiting, those who had relatives or interests beyond the Pyrenees were growing impatient. Mail must be accumulating at the Porté office. People were inclined to complain of the faint-heartedness of the new mail-carrier.

Ah! Asnurri had been far more conscientious. Asnurri had never shunned hard

work. Asnurri had no fear of avalanches. With one accord they fell to praising Asnurri.

In this village, buried in snow, gossip ran from one fireside to another as a swift stream runs through underground canals. All this finally brought about a quarrel between the old carrier and the new, and one evening Asnurri challenged his successor. This happened at the Xiriballs', as they sat around the fireplace. So huge was this fireplace that the blazing masses of green boxwood seemed a great bonfire: the wild wind — that Andorran wind that wails so mournfully through the old houses, cold and bare as shells — completed the illusion; it curbed the flames, whirled the ashes about, and scattered the burning leaves.

Now high, now low, the fire shed a red glow upon the faces of those gathered before it, or left them in the shadow thick with tobacco smoke; copper-colored faces, blue-black hair, tanned hands with knotted veins, mouths with glittering white teeth and toothless mouths, foreheads wrinkled

by age or hard work — all these details stood out clearly or disappeared at the will of wind and fire. An onlooker would have thought of Rembrandt's Night Watch.

Aside from the rival carriers, old Anton, Nyerro, and two neighbors were there that evening. Angelo and his father were reading by the lamp, not far from Conchita, who was rolling her cigars. Summoned by the grandmother's impatient tapping on the floor, Maria had gone upstairs grumbling.

"I tell you I shall go, and this very week," declared Asnurri.

"Then you may as well make your will!" retorted the other brutally.

But he heard no approving echo. These rough mountaineers, who master the mountain as the Arab masters his horse, were all on the side of Asnurri. Encouraged by the general approbation, the young man settled upon the day after the morrow as the time for his expedition. As if seized with remorse, the other declared he would follow him. Asnurri burst out laughing.

"Will you hold the avalanche back with

your shoulders if it comes? And if it does not come, what shall I do with you? Stay and keep yourself warm by the fireside along with the cats. I will go to Porté alone."

He went alone, starting in the dead of the night, so that he might reach the pass before the sun could melt the snow, undermine the gigantic soft mass, and finally hurl it, laden with rocks, down into the abyss.

Conchita was very uneasy. Her brother would be crossing the top of the pass at about seven o'clock. The sun would have risen, for the day promised to be fair; but it would not yet be powerful enough to disintegrate the millions of little crystals that paralyze an avalanche. The daring youth would surely cross in safety under the protection of these crystals, infinitely small, and under the protection of Saint Anthony.

He crossed in safety, but on his way back he recklessly descended the pass before the cold evening wind had again hardened the masses of snow; the avalanche bore him along with the oak behind which he had sought shelter.

They found both man and tree bound together as if bathed in the same blood and smitten with the same terror, — bound, not with arms and branches, for the man's arms were broken, but by means of teeth and bark. The dying man had bitten into the tree with such force that death had not separated them.

The entire village gave the daring mountaineer a magnificent funeral. He was neither the first nor the last victim of the mountain. Between the mountain and these rugged men there had existed for more than a thousand years a marriage of reason which had its stormy days. This was accepted as a matter of course, and no one hurled at the slayer those grandiloquent reproaches poets put upon the lips of the wives of sailors and mountaineers. They knelt beside the coffin, repeating simple words, inspired by a fatalism fed on tragedy and mitigated by faith.

They said: "He was a brave man. He died before his time. The will of God be done! Life is full of sorrow."

The sincere grief of Conchita touched the women. Maria, however, could not keep from saying to her as she kissed her that evening:

"It is a calamity, my child, but a calamity that makes you the richest heiress in Andorra. One of the richest pubillas in the whole country!"

Conchita answered simply, bitterly: "Too late."

That year, a little before the violets came, Paquita reappeared in Andorra, alone and with so slim a pretext that the audacity of her love made the men laugh and the girls blush. From behind closed windows eager eyes spied upon the young couple: Angelo wrapped in his cape that floated in the wind, she, true daughter of Spain, swathed in a violet cloak, her head covered with a scarf of beautiful striped wool, yellow and black. Her short skirts and her high heels, her delicate ankles and legs, her slender waist, gave her a fragile appearance which her face belied. The gentle Angelo grew troubled beneath the fire of her eyes. He stammered

out declarations of love, but what Paquita wanted was a promise for the future.

"We are 'nobios,'" she said.

"I have never promised you anything, Paquita," Angelo would reply.

"You have done better than that."

She made this retort with a dry little laugh that took away all her charm. Then, with no transition, she played the part of a suppliant and love-lorn maiden. To be sure, the brisk air, by turning her nose blue, reddening her cheeks and bringing tears to her eyes, had not increased her beauty. Angelo could not but notice the thinness of her face drawn by the cold, her long, sharp teeth, and the down upon her lips. But her mad daring and her instinctive grace gave her a strange fascination. Was she not the only woman Angelo had ever loved? How could he imagine loving any other?

Side by side they went down the rocky path that curved about the great cliff by la Solana. When it reached the valley, this path, like a weary traveller, lay in the shade of a hedge set with little trees.

From that point, Andorra seemed to be all black roofs and russet-colored façades below the great bald slope of the Puig d'Anclar. To the left of the village, massive and square, the Casa de la Vall lifted its little gables topped with slate.

When the lovers were seated, Paquita gazed at the beautiful face of the boy; but he looked toward his village, high, austere, discreet, bounded on the right by the spire of its old church, on the left by the Casa de la Vall. This village symbolized the whole life of Andorra as well as a remote European past. Small though it was, it was expressive with the dignity time alone can give. There old France and old Europe could contemplate their own youth, for the aspect of the Andorran capital had not changed greatly during the centuries. Angelo Xiriball looked upon it with filial respect. The words Paquita spoke came to him as if in a dream. Did he really love her? He believed he did, but it was merely his youth that was in love. Both family and religious discipline had made him a strong man at an age when

so many are swayed by their passions. He could have listened to the Sirens of Ulysses without needing to stop his ears. Not for a moment, even when he was carried away by his emotion, did he consider breaking the promise he had made his father. But he had suffered. The reflection of this suffering in the eyes of the young man inspired Paquita with confidence.

"Listen," she said to bring matters to a head. "I am taking the tartane for la Séo at two o'clock. And I want you to promise me . . . Otherwise . . ."

He gave a questioning look, but she avoided his gaze.

"You are so different from the girls here, you frighten me," he said, perturbed.

"Above all, different from that Concha, who is pretty enough — I will say that for her — but who seems very dull. If she didn't have so much money . . . Why do you look at me like that? You know very well that now her brother is dead, Concha is the richest pubilla in the village."

"How do you happen to know such things, Paquita?"

She replied that that was her secret: that she had many another, as people would see one of these days. Her violence was followed by so coquettish a pout that Angelo could not refrain from pressing her to his heart.

"Give me a few more weeks. I will speak to my father," he said, weakening for the first time. "And I will write you, Paquita. 'Amor meu, estrella dels meus uels.'"

If the young man did not, after all, speak to his father, it was not out of forgetfulness, but out of respect. He loved the grave, tender, and simple Joan, whose bruised heart and starved mind he was coming to understand, thanks to their now daily conversations.

It was a strange sight for la Solana, this father and son constantly brought together by talking and reading. On snowy or very rainy days Joan would read on humbly and patiently, his finger following the lines.

That winter he finished the Odyssey and began Virgil. Thus he came to know the enchantment of long voyages and then the dignity of tilling the soil.

Through the gracious influence of Angelo a miracle was being performed; the whole family, save only Nyerro, was slowly rising to a higher plane. After a century or two of obscurity, it was once more becoming one of those families of pagès so peculiar to the Andorran social order. The possession of wealth and of sound learning does not prevent these farmers from living on their lands and tilling them by the side of their servants. Boaz has taken refuge in these remote valleys and there he surveys his harvest.

How could one bring into such patriarchal surroundings the light-minded and untutored Paquita? His fear of grieving his father gave him courage to leave the girl's letters unanswered. The last one he had received contained vague threats.

One evening after dinner Nyerro declared unexpectedly:

"If my father and grandfather will give

their consent, I shall take for my wife Lolita de Babot."

The men turned their eyes toward him. Grown red with surprise, Maria and Conchita laid down their work.

"You want to marry?" said Joan at length.

"Haven't I a right to? What does my grandfather have to say?"

Old Anton, who always enjoyed displaying his authority, nodded with an air of satisfaction.

"We shall see," he said. "If it can be arranged, we shall go before the notary."

He had never spoken so plainly as regards the dreaded question of the inheritance.

In most cases this question is settled when marriages occur. It is true that Joan was the legal master of their lands, but his father still ruled over him. He would make him respect his wishes. A profound silence filled the kitchen. Angelo, who was reading with his hands over his ears, seemed to have heard nothing of what had passed.

Lingering in the doorway, Conchita said to Maria:

"I fear me the demon is going to succeed! But I shall speak to Joan myself. I shall, indeed."

Failing to grasp the meaning of these words, Maria Xiriball followed the girl home and said to her tremblingly:

"If you were willing, Conchita, there would be a way of saving both Angelo and me. You know very well, my child, that if Lolita de Babot comes to la Solana as mistress, I shall be treated like a servant and Angelo will be the Conco and childless!"

"That cannot be!" cried Conchita, as she lit her lamp. Somewhat soothed by the light, the two women continued the conversation more calmly beside the hearth, where green boxwood was crackling.

"If you would only consent, Conchita, Angelo would be héreu, and I should keep my place under my own roof. But, ah, me, will you consent?"

Conchita turned a troubled and ques-

tioning glance upon her. She shrank from further suffering through those she loved.

Maria Xiriball was lost in thought a moment. Then she continued rather timidly: "You can marry Angelo and become my daughter . . ."

"I? marry Angelo?" said Conchita, catching her breath. She had started to her feet as if the shade of beautiful Cisquo had jealously drawn her to his heart.

"Why are you so troubled, Conchita? Are you not young and beautiful and rich? And is not my Angelo likewise young and beautiful?"

"I am not young, Maria! I have held him on my knees."

"When you were six and he was four, my girl."

"I feel no love for Angelo, and it is my wish to live alone," said the kind-hearted maiden pleadingly. But she was already wavering.

Then the crafty Maria gave free vent to her tears.

"Do as you like! But I who have been a

mother to you, I who love you as if you were my own daughter, I know what is awaiting me: wretchedness and scorn. I, the mistress of la Solana, shall die there as a servant!"

"Say no more!" cried Conchita, grown pale. And as impetuous in her pity as in her love, she went on, dazed: "Speak to Angelo about it and be happy, Maria! As for me, it doesn't matter, I do not count. Come, Maria, dry your eyes."

With no effusiveness, for this sturdy race knows nothing of the sweetness of caresses, Maria Xiriball thanked her future daughter-in-law. She was jubilant. Not only would her authority be respected by this gentle girl, but the fair lands she had inherited would be added to those of the Xiriballs. The old domain of the seventeenth century would be reëstablished . . .

Maria Xiriball hastened to consult Joan. Did it not devolve on him to prepare Angelo for this change in his existence? There was no question as to the young man's acquiescence if it were not for that

Paquita, the worthless hussy who had won his love . . .

That night while Lola and Anton slept not far away, the husband and wife talked of the future of their race: Joan at first surprised, then radiant, congratulated himself on having chosen so clever a wife as Maria. The very next morning, as old Anton was taking his coffee, his son decided to speak to him of these fine projects. Motioning to the voluble Maria to be still, he was prudent enough to put his remarks in the form of a question.

"What would you say if Angelo were to marry Conchita Asnurri?"

Motionless, his head bent, the old man merely raised his eyes which gleamed between lids as shrivelled as dry leaves. Then he dropped his gaze again to the floor between his feet, clasped and unclasped his hands, and finally said, without allowing his voice to give any indication of his feeling:

"It is my daughter-in-law's idea?"

Astonished and uneasy, Joan and his wife assented briefly. Then the old man's

laugh broke out shrill and short as the note of the quail.

"Ha! Ha! She is a clever woman, my daughter-in-law! The Asnurri lands lie next those of the Xiriballs. Three hundred years ago they were all ours; it is but just that they should come back to us. Ha! Ha! The woman has a good head! To-day is Saturday. Monday we will go before the notary, no later than Monday, God willing."

Then he explained that the small sum left Nyerro by his mother would be rounded out. This would allow the youth to marry and every one would be content.

Anton talked on. He rubbed his dry hands together and they gave forth a sound as of crumpled paper. This old man, taciturn by nature, was becoming loquacious; this tyrant was now happy as a child. He was flushed and excited. Joan grew uneasy and broke off the conversation, saying that he was going into the woods with Maria. Conchita joined them on the way.

"Let me help you tie up fagots!" she said to Maria.

In reality she was seeking an opportunity to speak to Joan alone. Such opportunities were rare. The members of these hardy mountain families, like those of monastic communities, work together all day long, take the same hours of rest, and appear to give up all individuality. Only in the woods and by the springs members of the family occasionally scatter. There the sickle, the pitchfork, and the scythe no longer unite them in a common task.

Conchita followed the Xiriballs. She had spent much time in reflection since the evening before. Her uneasy snatches of sleep had been haunted by nightmares in which she saw Nyerro brandishing bloody weapons. The same terror pursued her during the day. How could she again cast in her lot with this family over which crime still seemed to hover? How could she endure the constant presence of a man so bent on evil? Would not Angelo be killed as his brother had been? And would not the mere remembrance of Nyerro's lustful eyes be intolerable?

Conchita was afraid. She was carrying a heavy responsibility as long as she kept silent. It would be better to put Joan on his guard, but only Joan, for he would be discreet. Conchita was already eager to preserve the honor of the Xiriballs.

It was a morning of silver, softened with rose-colored mists, vibrating with the sound of the Angelus and the tinkling of cow-bells, and stirred by the eternal flow of the living waters. Pebbles loosened from the uprooted oaks were heard rolling down in the near-by torrent. The vigorous blows of Joan's axe struck the young trunks the size of a man's arm. The trees fell midst the silken rustling of the leaves they had kept from the previous autumn. Then Maria's work began: she cut off the twigs with her pruning-hook and Conchita bound them into fagots.

Suddenly a startled shrew-mouse darted across the path at the feet of the two women. Conchita was greatly agitated.

"My mother used to say those creatures bring ill-luck!" she said.

"You are going out of your way to look for trouble," cried Maria. "Leave misfortune alone. If you speak of it you will arouse it, for it is but sleeping. You see Joan is laughing at you!"

Joan was, indeed, laughing, but in his own way. This silent laughter lighted his eyes and made him look singularly young and kind. Conchita was in despair, for she felt she could never cause this good man the terrible distress of such a revelation.

But toward evening he said something that made her decide to speak. They were alone, for Maria had gone back to prepare dinner.

Joan made a suggestion: "I am going home, and I shall send Nyerro with his mule to fetch the fagots. If you are tired, wait for him. He will gladly take you, too."

Conchita, who was bending over, turned white and stood erect. Night was creeping up from the valley and its shadows brought a vision of the look of hatred and passion she had seen on the face of Nyerro.

"I would rather go with you, Joan!" she murmured. "I am afraid of Nyerro . . ."

He looked at her in surprise, at first displeased, and then quite puzzled, for Conchita's pallor betrayed her terror. He stammered: "You are afraid . . . afraid of my boy?"

In the midst of her tears she cried out, yielding to a nervous strain she had already endured too long:

"Yes, I am afraid, Joan! For myself, for Angelo, for all of you. . . Send him away! Send him away! He will kill Angelo as he . . ."

She could not finish her sentence, for Joan Xiriball had laid his heavy hand upon her shoulder. As she gave way beneath it, he held her up with the other hand, and in a low, heartrending voice he merely said:

"Be still. I understand . . ."

In single file the two went toward the village, Joan walking very rapidly as if to flee from Conchita, who was slackening her pace. The girl was thinking that since the

father had listened without comment, he must have himself, if only for a moment, entertained a like suspicion.

She watched him go down the mountainside with his even, automatic step. His arms hung limp. No reflex action came to his aid when he stumbled and fell backwards on the rock. Alarmed, Conchita ran up to him.

Lost in meditation, his eyes fixed on the ground, he did not even attempt to get up. The approach of Conchita aroused him. He cast a startled glance about and then, recognizing her, asked, with a wild look in his staring eyes: "How did you know?"

"He told me himself one evening in a fit of wrath," she confessed, her face flushed with embarrassment.

Once more he left her behind and disappeared from her sight in the village street.

But Conchita had heard the agonized words: "Brothers . . . brothers!"

As she came to her own door she once more found herself in the presence of Joan Xiriball, who said, for the ears of the

passers-by: "I will bring you some fagots to-morrow."

And in a low tone he added, when no one was near: "This evening I shall have the proof I need, but no one must suspect, least of all my father. He must not know of my shame!"

For he felt himself responsible for the son who had been born to him.

The proof was easily obtained. In the stable, by the light of a candle, Joan suddenly thrust under Nyerro's eyes the letter the contrabandist had given him five years before.

"Read that," he commanded in a cold and terrible voice.

Nyerro bent over to read, all unsuspecting, for he had forgotten his crime. A stifled cry escaped him; he snatched the letter from his father's hand, held it in the candle-flame, and then, breathing more freely, stammered: "Well! What of it? What of it?"

Without a word Joan pointed to the door, and Nyerro went out, his teeth chattering.

But the next morning at dawn Joan heard him rubbing down his mules. It was Joan who lowered eyes full of despair before the triumphant look of the criminal. Nyerro would never go away, for he knew that his father could not denounce him.

XI

THE HATRED OF A BROTHER

STRANGE, indeed, was the betrothal of Conchita and of Angelo! Two phantoms were forever between them. Between them also was the friendship that had always existed. No doubt, both felt a vague satisfaction. Conchita dreamed of a home, and it was not without pride that Angelo contemplated the fertile lands unfolding before his eyes, lands which were to be his. But the tête-à-têtes which the Xiriballs rather awkwardly arranged were painful to them. They avoided one another, and it was only in the presence of strangers that they seemed to be at ease.

Joan had said to his son: "I wish you to marry her. She is kind and she is beautiful. What is more, she has as much land as we. In times gone by, she loved, but in the eyes of the village her honor is safe."

He added, with the shrewdness of the mountaineer: "There is not a man alive

who does not look upon her with respect. The priest thinks more highly of her than of any other girl in the village."

Angelo had answered absent-mindedly, "I know it."

And without reading them, he tore up the letters of Paquita, who was making fresh attempts to see him. Must he not obey his family? The family! The young Andorran was sufficiently well read to give that word all its historical and Roman meaning. Yes, the Roman family and the European family of the Middle Ages was perpetuated in this little land lost in the Pyrenees, "this museum where the great neighboring countries can see, clearly crystallized, the state of their own institutions eight centuries ago." And while other countries sacrifice everything upon the altar of the fatherland, these mountaineers, whose poor land no one covets, sacrifice everything upon the altar of the family.

Angelo reflected: "No toll of lives is asked of us, but we pay another toll. We have no military organization, therefore

we must have that of the family. If we allow the Andorran home to be undermined, if we are like Europe in her defects only, since we cannot be like her in heroism, what will become of us?"

His mind was convinced, though his heart was not.

One evening when Conchita was dining at la Solana, as she often did, a man from la Massana came in to discuss the purchase of a mule.

They put another plate on the table. During the meal no one spoke of business, but when they had eaten their cheese, this man, with Anton and Joan, drew up to the hearth.

Then the discussion really began. It was not violent, but obstinate on both sides, and as close-woven as the heavy linen patiently wrought in the village. Their heads in their red caps came near together and their faces showed repressed anger; now they relaxed and fumbled in the same tobacco pouch. The purchaser and Anton kept on bargaining, quietly, persistently.

Their words came slowly, hissing through their few remaining teeth. They were very old men whom Joan, out of respect, let have their say.

Tired of her husband's silence, Maria Xiriball ventured to put in a word. Old Anton was annoyed and led his companion toward the window. They seated themselves opposite one another upon the stone benches. With their Phrygian caps, shaking as they talked, their great Saracen noses and the nervous gestures of their bony hands, they stood out against the moonlight like the black silhouettes of a magic lantern.

Joan expressed his regret at seeing the affair concluded without him and he advised Angelo to go listen to the two men.

"It will soon be you, won't it, who will settle all such matters?" he asked, watching Nyerro closely.

The young man's pallor betrayed his emotion. He cast a quick glance toward his brother and said nothing. When Conchita was ready to go home, Joan rose and

said he would accompany her. He walked by her side in silence, lit the lamp on her threshold, and left her without raising his eyes.

The girl understood that he would protect her.

During the night they heard Nyerro's dog, Mourillo, howl with pain; not once, but ten times, like an animal that is being martyred.

Maria awoke and said to Joan: "That is Nyerro beating his dog. It is shameful. Go and make him stop. He is capable of killing him, for he was very angry to-night. Did you see his eyes? Jealousy is stifling him. In your place I would advise him to go live elsewhere and I would give him his money. That would be better for every one."

Joan demurred for the sake of appearances, but in his heart he admired the wisdom of his wife. Rising from his bed, he went toward the window, and opened it wide. In the starlit night, he saw Nyerro, his garments torn from an expedition he

had just made, no one knew where. The dog was tied to a post and could not escape. He writhed in pain beneath the blows. For a moment Joan looked silently upon his son, his own flesh and blood, symbol of his shame.

He recalled that Nyerro's maternal grandfather had been perverse to the point of cruelty. He understood that the evil spirit of this family had entered the house of Xiriball and would never leave it, unless he, Joan, the responsible head, found a way to cast it out.

The next day his wife said to him: "You did not sleep all night long. Are you ill? You do not look well of late, you seem to have grown old all at once. What is the matter with you?"

He went out without answering.

XII

PAQUITA'S REVENGE

O LORD, have mercy upon your servant! Have you rescued her from the abyss of misery and shame only to plunge her into an abyss of sorrow?

"You came to my aid when I was poor. Behold, I now have servants and lands. I was an orphan and you gave me a family. But peace, who will give me peace? Why has this dreadful dream been sent me? What does it mean?

"Let me but relate it to you, O Lord, our Father, and to you Mary, Holy Mother. I was in the woods with the Xiriballs. I had a child in my arms and we were all happy; but lo! a rock rolled down upon us, crushing my little one, leaving me unharmed. Then I saw Nyerro who laughed and danced, as he said:

"'It was I who rolled down the rock. It was I.'

"I rushed up to him, but as I passed near

the hole the huge stone had left, I saw that a man covered with a white shroud lay therein. . . . Only his forehead and his eyes were to be seen . . . the eyes of Cisquo . . . and they were full of terror. . . . I was so frightened that I awoke. And I have come to you, O Lord, to implore you to protect me from this fear and from Cisquo whom I no longer have the right to love."

The sound of steps interrupted this prayer Conchita was murmuring in the twilight of a chapel to the left of the church. The steps came to a standstill.

Conchita did not look around, so she did not see Angelo, nor did he see her.

Leaning against the wall, his arms folded, his beautiful face raised toward the pale light of dawn, Angelo was gazing at the high altar upon which a child was lighting tapers.

This mass said at three o'clock in the morning was unusual. Wishing to make the most of this rare and pious occasion, women wearing the black capuxa came in noiselessly and knelt upon the flagstones. With

their wide skirts and their small heads they recalled so many haystacks in a field.

Angelo looked searchingly at each of them, seeking the artful face of Paquita.

The day before she had sent him this mysterious note:

"If you wish to see me for the last time, come to the church to-morrow morning at three o'clock. I shall be there."

It was, no doubt, a lover's rendezvous. Although this seemed natural to the Spanish girl, it disturbed Angelo's sense of propriety.

Yet Angelo had come, to find out what she desired, to see once more the face of his dreams, to exchange with Paquita a last farewell. Had she not written: "If you wish to see me for the last time? . . ."

When the tapers were all lit, the light of day vanished before them. Only a vague pallor lingered in the little round windows and gave them the look of great eyes, blind and white. The whole church was aglow with reddish candle flames that made the old gold gleam and long blue shadows

flicker on the stone floor. The confessional, painted a vivid red and carved like a Swiss chalet, stood out not far from the pulpit. From it rose the slender stem of a slanting crucifix. Angelo saw all these things in a daze. He felt within him the mysterious and dreaded pang that precedes great sorrows. So the uneasy rippling of a calm sea forecasts a tempest.

Suddenly his heart beat louder. He was aware of a stir in front of the church. Suspicion flashed through his mind.

The door opened.

"O Lord," prayed Conchita Asnurri, "what means this new trial? She whom Angelo loves appears before my eyes this morning, after the vision of Cisquo. She laughs and her laughter is wicked. . . . A young man is with her. . . . I do not dream. She is beautiful. . . . Whom is she watching with this defiant air?"

Conchita turned and saw Angelo. Very erect, whiter than a shroud, his arms folded, his eyes fixed, he was contemplating Paquita with her husband. This kind of

marriage is frequent in Andorra. Many a pair of lovers have had their union blessed in this country where civil marriage does not exist, where the religious ceremony alone counts.

Suddenly parents and guardians are confronted by an accomplished fact. It is impossible to allege illegality; there is none. How many romantic idylls have been consecrated in this wild valley where the waters hollow out deep ravines, where the summits rise sharp and shining, like lances!

Faithful to tradition, the Andorran priest does not hesitate to perform these strange marriages. Paquita, unwelcome to the family of the young man who loved her, had found a way to marry him and at the same time to avenge herself on Angelo. What a revenge, to marry before he did and thus to flaunt her indifference and scorn!

Clad in black silk, slim and supple, her small head framed in the halo of her beautiful mantilla, her red lips parted in a cruel smile, she went toward the altar, knelt, and bowed in prayer.

Dim rays from without crept in and mingled with the red glow of the candles.

The light of day strove to overcome the light from the altar. Suddenly silver streams fell from the little round windows. When Paquita raised her head, it came into a square of daylight and her sharp profile shone like a jewel beneath the black roses.

The mother of Paquita, kneeling near the witnesses, slyly glanced around as she told her beads. When she noticed Angelo, she lowered her eyes with a pitying look and appeared to be lost in her prayers.

Angelo shuddered. The church and all these faces seemed new to him. They formed the background of a nightmare.

A first sorrow going to the very depths of a heart that nothing has yet hardened refracts the whole image of life as none other ever will. In one instant everything is changed. Hence the impression of living in a hideous dream from which one hopes to awake. . . .

Without waiting for the mass to end, feverish, with great beads of perspiration

standing on his forehead, Angelo left the church. Morning welcomed him on the little village square. It was the hour when children and birds greet the day. Some of the mule-drivers were already leaving for the mountain; others were returning from their nightly expeditions with loads of charcoal. They hailed Angelo, who replied with the voice of one aroused from slumber.

He turned his back on la Solana to suffer alone. He was still young enough to cherish grief. Between walls and fences the road beyond the village made its way through the fields, toward the Valira. He followed it. As he passed the first turning, a gentle voice said behind him:

"So you and I have had the same idea. I came to see how last night's heavy rain had affected our rye."

"It is you, Conchita!" he said, almost inaudibly.

She went on, repressing the sadness of one betrothed without love:

"If you think it best I shall hire two more farm-hands until All Saints' Day."

He answered in the friendly tone of a kind young master.

In the fields the soft earth clung to their shoes, the grass wet their garments and the little willows, tossed by the wind, shook their drops of silver upon the black braids of Conchita. She was beautiful, but neither he nor she knew it. By tacit agreement they continued this aimless stroll to the astonishment of the mule-drivers passing on the road above them, who said to one another:

"There go the lovers. Ha! Ha! They are out early, looking for mushrooms, no doubt. . . ."

They laughed, but the young couple did not hear them. The waters, swollen by the storm, roared louder than ever. Here and there in the midst of the fields the rain and the whirling wind had flattened the rye as if wild boars had wallowed there.

"It is a pity," said Angelo; "some of it will never come up again."

She answered at random, glad to see him less sad, for she felt a deep friendship for him.

The morning wind cooled their foreheads.

Old Lola died quietly in her sleep. Joan grieved. Anton merely said in a low voice:

"She was a good woman, but she had lived her life."

As for Maria, she shed a few tears, for death moved her deeply.

The passing of Lola made no change in the life of the Xiriballs, but it gave them a good pretext for celebrating very simply the wedding of Angelo and Conchita.

Joan had implored his daughter-in-law to endure the presence of Nyerro a little longer, until he could arrange matters.

"Above all, do not let Angelo know anything about it," he would say.

She promised to be patient, but expressed a wish to spend the first weeks of her married life in her own home. So, it was to her lonely house that Angelo took her the evening of their wedding day. He was as aloof as she was sad.

It was a midsummer night, black, dense as water, and spangled with stars. The

windows were dark; a cricket sang its melancholy song on the hearth. The air was fragrant with the fresh boxwood that Conchita's friends had laid in garlands upon her threshold. Maria Xiriball lit the lamp and withdrew quietly. She had not the gift of understanding. In her simple and somewhat commonplace heart no voice arose in behalf of their twofold distress. She thought it the part of tact to leave them alone and assumed that air of discreet complicity which older people think they must take on in the presence of love.

Untutored though she was, she could more easily have solved an equation than have discovered the rôle she should have played. Had she but stayed a little longer, motherly with these two who were, unfortunately, merely good friends and were trying to play an impossible part, had she but talked, talked of anything to break the ice of their silence, or evoked with a word or two the charm of happy homes, could she have been tender with them, and so helped them!

Left alone with her husband, Conchita humbly and awkwardly began to set the house in order. But this welcome task was soon at an end, for Maria had already done it for her. The moment had come when the young woman must think of preparing for the night.

Then very gently Angelo said to her:

"You are not happy?"

She sighed:

"I no longer know how to be happy. Forgive me." And she added the desperate confession:

"I obeyed your mother."

"So did I," said Angelo, in a tone free from any bitterness.

They looked at each other and the light of their pure hearts shone in their distressed eyes. Much too simple to speak of their deepest feelings, they felt they had nothing more to say after this humble avowal. To call up the past, were it but to find an excuse in it, would have seemed to them to dishonor this home which they were founding, despite themselves, but which was to be their home.

Then, to end this painful silence, they spoke of the land, of their plans. When they stopped speaking, the chirping of the cricket was heard and in her heart Conchita blessed the invisible songster. She had never known how much anguish could come from silence between a man and a woman. The silence of her solitary evenings seemed sweet in comparison.

"Conchita," said Angelo at last with brotherly gentleness, "I shall be your faithful friend. Never fear, Conchita." His voice broke, for he dared not promise more.

But the young woman understood, and drawing near Angelo she put her two hands upon his shoulders.

"You are kind," she murmured. "You have pity on me. I knew you when you were a child, but now, behold, you are a man . . . Angelo, you shall be my refuge! . . ."

She spoke so low that the cricket singing on the hearth was heard above the girl's trembling voice.

XIII

THE HOLLOW LOG

PEOPLE envied the Xiriballs. A sequence of deaths, a cleverly planned marriage, had made their family the richest in the country. Angelo's intellectual attainments also added to their prestige. There was no doubt that the Xiriballs were emerging from their obscurity and would one day play an active part in public affairs. If Joan wished to be chosen consul at the next election, he had only to say so. His popularity interfered with the ambitions of others. Therefore he had his enemies who would have liked to put a stop to the rise of his family.

Instinctively and without consulting one another, as if under the sway of some evil power, the envious knew that the best policy would be to set Nyerro against his brother. Nyerro was known to be jealous, underhanded, and cruel, capable of almost anything in the dark. Behind this uncanny

figure and under its protection the envious could lay their schemes. They deemed it wise to express sympathy for Nyerro when he passed by.

"He goes about like a servant, and he the eldest," they said.

"Why doesn't he go to work elsewhere? He could earn fully as much!"

Now that he was dispossessed, Lolita de Babot no longer encouraged Nyerro to pay her court. One evening at a fireside where jealousy made him welcome, he learned of the girl's engagement.

"Ho! Ho!" he said maliciously. "I have an idea that will soon be over. She is one of those who put Easter before Palm Sunday!"

This coarse jest was greeted with a burst of laughter, and he took advantage of the general merriment to withdraw. His anger made him fairly stagger as he went out into the gray shades of night. He uttered an oath as he struck his head against the corner of a wall, and then went home to bed.

He spent a feverish, sleepless night.

A few evenings later, as Maria and Conchita were boiling potatoes in a huge copper kettle, Nyerro brought in a few logs and laid them on the fire with particular care.

"There was wood enough before," observed Conchita in the impatient tone she always used with him.

"Never mind! Leave him alone!" said Maria. "We have no need of saving wood."

Thereupon Nyerro, who had been bending over the fire, straightened up and cast upon the young woman such a look of cruel joy that she shuddered. It seemed to her that she had been struck in the dark.

Every evening, out of spite, because of the aversion Conchita plainly felt for him, Nyerro sat close to her before the fire and smoked, his eyes half closed. But that evening when he had put on the last log, he announced:

"I am going out. Good-night to you all."

Conchita's anguish grew. She worried constantly. Her disposition was less even

than usual, and her health not so good because she had hopes of motherhood. The gift of premonition she had always possessed seemed to have increased. Maria, who was superstitious, harkened to her daughter-in-law as to an oracle.

Conchita breathed hard as she stared at the fire. Joan, who came in shortly after the departure of Nyerro, glanced at the young woman and said to her:

"You are pale. Is anything wrong?"

She answered in a low voice because of Maria, who was wiping the dishes a few steps away:

"I am afraid . . . afraid of what he has just done. He looked at me so strangely when he put that wood on the fire."

Joan also turned white, and like Conchita he stared at the crackling fire. The logs were choking it, and to revive it Maria had slipped a branch of boxwood beneath the caldron.

A painful process was going on in the mind of Joan; his heavy, blind thought travelled as slowly as a mole through a

field. That wicked glance of Nyerro's . . . the log that Joan had seen him hollowing out that very day . . .

He suddenly realized the truth, and exclaimed in a voice strangely altered:

"Go out! Go out, all of you! No, I don't really mean that, Maria. . . . I was thinking of all this smoke that is so bad for Conchita. . . . There is too much wood on the fire. . . . Get out of the way, child. Get out of the way. . . . Let me take off these logs. . . . Stand back, in God's name!" he said between his teeth.

She understood. Seized with a nervous trembling, she fled to the farther end of the kitchen, and watched the heroic Joan lift an armful of Nyerro's logs and, unmindful of burns, carry them outdoors. Then he ran back for a pail of water.

Old Anton, who was just coming in, called out playfully:

"Ah, ah, I see there are still some madmen at large. What can have come over my first-born?"

"This wood has an unpleasant odor. The

fire is smoking, and that is bad for Conchita!" Maria replied in all sincerity.

She had made the young woman sit down and was holding a cool; wet cloth to her temples.

"It is nothing," she kept repeating. "Joan has frightened you. . . . He is too brusque. . . . Here he is, now. What is the matter with you, Joan? You must see the doctor: you haven't been looking well for some time past."

"Be still!" said Joan impatiently. "I am perfectly well. The truth is I am growing old. Draw up to the fire, Conchita. Don't be afraid. Henceforth I shall pick out the wood myself." Then he added in a low tone, for her alone: "I shall send him off . . ."

Conchita's sad eyes filled with gratitude and rested upon Joan. It was his foresight and courage that had saved her, and with her, the child of his race.

When the whole family had gone to bed, Joan Xiriball made his way to the shed where Nyerro slept. The door was locked.

He broke it open with his shoulder, drove away the whining dog who had followed him in, and bent over his son. In his arms he held the log full of powder.

Though he could see nothing clearly, Nyerro instinctively recognized his father and understood his gesture. He crouched and shielded his head with uplifted arm.

Father and son saw each other dimly, for the faint light of the stars came through the open door. Each was afraid of the other.

"I shall not kill you," said Joan in a muffled voice, "but you must go away."

Nyerro did not answer. Still crouching, he continued to shield his head with his arms, watching his father's movements closely.

The latter went on: "I shall buy you a little house at Soldeu. You will have your own home; you can marry. That is far more than you deserve, monster that you are!"

"That may be," replied Nyerro, somewhat reassured, "but you do this for me

because you cannot help it. You are afraid of me!"

"Take care!" said Joan threateningly. He had dropped the log upon the bed and was standing with clenched fists.

Nyerro began to laugh.

"Well, what do you mean? What can you do to me? Think of the shame that would come upon the family if it were known in the country."

Then slowly and heavily the father leaned toward his unworthy son. He opened his hands, the large calloused hands of a mountaineer, seized the neck of the criminal and tightened his grasp. He was calm, but with a calm that was terrifying. Nyerro tried to call for help, but the cry was stifled in his throat.

He writhed like a worm, and then all of a sudden caught his breath again.

Joan was speaking in a grave, low voice:

"And if to save the honor of the family I were to strangle you this very night, who would dare accuse me? If some evening I throw you into the Valira, who will dare say

I did it? No one would believe that I, your father, could be your murderer. I am stronger than you, pitiful creature that you are! Go! Let me never see you again!"

Still choking, but now with rage, the young man had leapt from his bed. As he stood there, his legs trembling, his shirt open upon his hairy chest, dishevelled, panting, he was the personification of fear.

"You . . . my father . . ." he stammered.

"You . . . their brother!" Joan replied relentlessly.

"It was for the sake of the land! Give me land! Give me my share of the land of the Xiriballs. Divide it!"

The head of the family of Xiriball shrugged his shoulders. Divide the land! If their forefathers had divided the land in this country which has so little, there would scarcely be one small field for each family! Unable to express his tumultuous thoughts, perhaps disdaining to attempt to do so in the presence of this degenerate son, he was merely conscious that Nyerro's request was a mad one. His duty as Cap de Casa was

not to diminish but to increase his sacred trust.

Divide the land, as is done in France! In France the peasant must limit his posterity to avoid that parcelling out which is so destructive of patrimonies.

In the course of his trips to Anjou where he was in the habit of buying mules, Joan Xiriball had had every opportunity to observe the condition of the French peasantry. And he returned from each journey more thoroughly convinced that, if the laws of his country were hard, they were also productive of good results. France, vast and prosperous, could afford to be seriously ill and would not die, but Andorra would not survive the same illness.

Joan could not understand how he chanced to have a son who dared to undermine the traditions of thousands of years.

It was clear that Nyerro had inherited his own passion for the land. But this passion which had ennobled Joan had debased Nyerro.

Joan fully realized that Angelo loved the

land through his Virgil, but was not passionately attached to it. His sons, he himself, perhaps, would become pagès. They would cultivate their fields, often working side by side with their farm servants. At times they would be directing the work, at times, perhaps, leading in public affairs. Thanks to Angelo, the Xiriballs would once more take their place among the aristocracy of Andorra, but the arrayo would not suffer thereby.

What beautiful dreams Joan would have dreamt but for this horrible menace . . .

He looked now at the pallid face of Nyerro, grown cunning again, now at the log full of powder which had all but annihilated his race. Wrath laid hold of him anew. Shaking his miserable son by the shoulders, he said:

"Beware. I give you till harvest-time. If you haven't gone before that . . ."

Too deeply moved to finish his sentence, he turned and left abruptly, followed by the whining Mourillo. The dog was surpised to scent an enemy in the master of la Solana.

Unmindful of the sleeping village, they had been talking with the door open. Perhaps some words were overheard by a passer-by. A rumor was spread abroad that the murderer of Cisquo belonged to his own family. The news travelled discreetly, for it was, indeed, a terrible suggestion. The mountaineer is circumspect. He rarely accuses without proof. He knows that within the narrow limits of the village words never die, but awaken echoes. It is well-nigh impossible to induce him to testify at court. Weary of useless investigations, the sheriff one day presented himself at la Solana and asked to see Joan in private.

It happened that Joan was alone. In the room over the kitchen they heard the steps of Maria and Angelo who had scarcely left Conchita since the birth of her son three days before. Anton and Nyerro were in the fields.

After an awkward preamble, the sheriff asked Joan if he had never suspected that any one close to him might be the murderer of Cisquo.

"It is an old and sad affair which I am very sorry to bring up again, but justice, alas, has nothing to do with sentiment. Forgive me."

Standing very straight, the head of the family replied, with a harsh look in his eyes:

"I do not know what you mean. We all mourn for our Cisquo! Let us not stir up . . ."

He was interrupted by the arrival of Nyerro. At the sight of the sheriff, the young man betrayed his agitation and seemed to reel. He looked at his father, and the sheriff detected the glance exchanged between this father and son, enemies and yet accomplices. A strange and terrible complicity! Joan found himself obliged to defend the son whom he longed to chastise, and the son who hated his father was obliged to implore his help. Nor was it in vain; Joan repeated in a firmer voice:

"Let the dead sleep in peace! We ask nothing more of justice after all these years . . ."

The sheriff replied rather sharply that

justice in any event would take its course. And he added, looking at Nyerro significantly:

"I shall return."

"Whenever you like," replied Joan quietly.

And with all due ceremony he accompanied the sheriff to the end of the street, speaking of diverse things. His attitude misled the passers-by; even the sheriff seemed favorably impressed.

But when he returned home, Joan tore off his mask. Although he was still young, he presented the appearance of an old man tall and terrible. Nyerro had sunk down on the stone bench.

Joan pointed to the door and merely said, his eyes flashing:

"To-morrow!"

An instant later he added, as if to himself:

"France or Spain. It matters little. I have already spread the report of your departure. Later on I shall give a good reason for it and people will forget. You will have your money."

Stupefied, Nyerro kept repeating as though he did not grasp the meaning of the words:

"To-morrow . . . To-morrow . . . To-morrow."

The next morning as she rose, Maria said to Joan in the greatest surprise:

"What is the matter with you? Your hair seems to have grown white overnight. I fear you are going to fall ill. Go see the doctor, Joan, please do. You will soon look as old as your father."

The villagers said:

"How does it happen that he seems so worn and so weary now that he has servants?"

XIV

PUNISHMENT

AT the hour when night, assailed by day, breaks up and scatters its shadows over the fields like flocks of crows, while the silver doves of dawn gather upon the heights, it is not unusual to meet a solitary traveller in the Andorran gorges. His stick in his hand, his tapaboquès on his shoulders and his barettina pulled down over his forehead, he goes toward the high pastures where the village flocks are fattening under the care of a herdsman and his dogs.

The herdsman, if he watches over cows, is called a baqué: if he watches over mares, an équassé. The Andorran summits, spires of Gothic cathedrals, form his horizon, while dogs with eyes of fire are his companions. Occasionally, a mule-driver passes in the distance; the two exchange greetings, if the wind is favorable.

For the wind is his friend, a capricious friend if ever there was one. At times it

teases him in his solitude. It carries off his tapaboquès and his tam-o'-shanter and raises a hard, glittering dust. Nervous, fantastic, with flying manes, the black mares bound off in all directions. Sometimes the wind, grown kind and gentle, dies down. It has breathed over the fields and villages. It carries the fragrance of the hearth. It awakens love.

And when, in its thousand blue meshes, it has imprisoned all the tinklings of the bells, all the murmuring of the waters, all the evening prayers and all the sighs of mankind, the solitary shepherd, awed by the unknown, greets the wind and calls it raséro; that is, he who has gathered the sounds of the earth to turn them into heavenly music.

The arrival of the villager is a distraction for the shepherd. He sees him from afar, making his way through the gorge, and he rejoices. For an hour or more, sometimes a whole day, they will talk of the village.

That year the Xiriballs had entrusted the baqué with eight cows and the équassé with two mules. When Nyerro had decided to

flee, he reflected and chose France as the place of his exile. The trans-Pyrenean railroad employs thousands of workmen. He could easily find something to do.

Moreover, on the slope of the Embalire Pass he would meet his mules; he would see for the last time Ourdillo and Castagné, the only living creatures he had ever loved. . . .

His long meditation was filled with confusion and bitterness, and interrupted by restless slumber from which he awoke in terror. It was three o'clock in the morning. Nyerro rose, put on his sandals, dressed and wrapped his tapaboquès about his shoulders. Despite the season, it was cold. As he went out of the stable, Nyerro shivered. Just then Mourillo ran up and licked his hand, whining. Was he to be taken along on the journey? His master kicked him.

The dog crept away humbly, but when Nyerro reached the road he noticed him at his heels and shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

That day the moon began to dawn only an hour before the sun, so that it silvered a

sky already pale in the light of a new morning. When, in response to Christ's gesture, life came back to the glassy eyes of Lazarus, it must have had this lunar pallor before it shone resplendent. Instead of the rose, the saffron, and the flame color of the rising sun, there hung in the east iridescent mother-of-pearl, the pale violet of the opal, and a tender green that recalled the glow-worm's soft breath of light.

Immersed in these delicate waves, the moon slowly awoke. The moon is the sun of the dead. It sheds its pallor upon tombs and upon the livid faces of wretched men who go along dim roads like wandering dogs.

The moon is beautiful and full of secrets, so sleep comes to hide it away from men, for men must not know everything.

Pallid as Nyerro himself, two or three new houses lifted their silver gables above the narrow streets. The others would have merged into the brown of the mountain but for the outlines of their roofs.

Nyerro went by them and, at his right, he saw, spreading way down to the Valira,

drenched in moonlight, the lands of the Xiriballs, fields of bluish tobacco and fresh-mown fields strewn with stacks of rye. As he went along, Nyerro picked up a bit of earth. He crushed it between his fingers, smelled of it, and cast it away angrily. He started to run. Perhaps he was tempted to end his days there in the waters of the Valira, which the dawn of the sun and the dawn of the moon clothed with imperial splendor.

These turbulent waters were redolent of mountain and snow, as the green fruit is redolent of the bitterness of the tree.

Their waves, short, abrupt, and nervous, had never seen the sun. They had gushed forth into the night from the gloomy depths of the mountain, past the cool granite, the red clay, the rich mica, the sands spangled with gold.

They differed from rivers flowing through the plains, soiled by many a city, warmed by many a sun, as virgins differ from courtesans.

Andorran waters are so clear that, high

above the ravine, mule-drivers can see the trout glide along. Light as chamois, the drivers run down to cast their coarse nets. The wild waters, true amazons of the mountain, waters as yet unpolluted by men, swollen with darkness and tumult, cold as the snow on the heights, could speak no human tongue to Nyerro. They had reflected nothing but the monstrous faces of sombre caves.

Fear laid hold of him. He went back to the road and took up his journey. The Valira seemed to follow him, growing wilder and wilder as the youth went on and up. At the end of two hours he reached the village of Encamp.

"Adios, Xiriball! Where are you going?" some one said to him.

"To Embalire, to see my mules! Adios!"

Between Encamp and Canillo, Nyerro had to follow a bridle-path, at times sunk deep in the boxwood, more often raised by steep mountain buttresses. So an athlete would raise his burden above his head with the mere strength of his hands.

This is one of the strangest places in Andorra. From mountains, russet or silver, grass-grown at the base and straight as towers, torrents, almost vertical, dash down into the writhing Valira, thick, glaucous, greenish black, a hydra smitten by the swords of archangels.

It seemed as though the sun could never reach these gloomy abysses. But suddenly there burst forth toward the east, through a narrow gorge, a long triangle of rose-colored light, like a light on a stage. The bushes glittered, a few birds, whom the noise of the water silenced, darted out from the boxwood. A reddish hamlet with black roofs built like a mediæval castle shimmered in the light at the summit of a mass of overhanging rocks.

Halfway between the two villages the path rose to a dizzy height above the Valira. It was separated from the river by a gigantic staircase whose every step was a field of rye stretching to the abrupt edge of the mountain.

In the full light of the sun Nyerro's eyes

wandering beyond the rye fields where the reapers swung their sickles, fell upon the Valira. It swept into black whirlpools around the shining rocks that choked it.

For a moment he contemplated these red-belted and red-capped men, these waters swollen with wrath and mystery. He shuddered and shook his head as if in answer to a secret voice. Flee! Reach the hospitable land of France! Not to die, but to live, live on . . .

An hour before as he passed near the shrine of Notre-Dame of Méritxell, the patron saint of Andorra, the wretched traveller had suddenly been tempted to stop and pray.

But crime, and above all the satisfaction crime had brought him for so long a time, weighed upon his soul, a soul sunk in hopeless night. Stronger in the face of the temptation to pray than in the face of the temptation to kill, Nyerro had gone on defiantly.

Nor did the tall steeple of Canillo stir anything within him. High and white behind a black yew tree growing close to

its wall, the square belfry overlooked and graced the steep village street.

Buried in snow for five months of the year, the inhabitants of Canillo are solemn and slow. The men are smugglers or mule-drivers; the women, with their large eyes, appealing rather than beautiful, live blameless lives, seen of all, for there the roofs lie as close together as the fingers of a hand. They leave their work only at the call of a sweet-toned bell, to go to mass and vespers.

In the streets, too narrow for vehicles to pass, dark, silent children, already cautious in the presence of strangers, run about. They are oddly decked out in the clothes of their elders. The little boys' trousers hang about their bare heels and the little girls wear long skirts and tight-fitting bodices. Deprived of everything that makes life easy, even deprived of a highway, the village knows nothing but work. It is like a poor monastery where love would be tolerated and passion precluded. Dignity of carriage, of look, and of conversation strikes the traveller who ventures into these gorges.

He comes to realize that the mountains spiritualize men as truly as the life of the fertile plains flowing with wine dulls their sensibilities.

Nyerro went through Canillo without stopping. A little farther up, near a spring, he paused to eat and drink, and toward eleven o'clock he came to the last Andorran village, Soldeu.

It was under the cruel midday sun that he began the laborious ascent of the Embalire Pass.

Pines covered the mountain on the right, and behind it, sharp and black, three thousand metres high, rose the double summit of the Pessons. Not a village, not a house, not even a cabin, but in these forests the pitiless presence of men was revealed by hewn trees lying across the clearings. At the height Nyerro had reached, the tumult of the waters gave way to that of the eternal wind, the incessant beating of wings against deafened ears. Behind the pass, standing out jagged as a saw against the harsh blue, the Pas de la Casa was already to be seen,

gray, glittering, and bare. The herds must be near. The dust they raised floated like shining smoke against the sky. From time to time he heard the tinkling of their bells borne along on the changing wind.

It was a silver sound, a monochord, but heavenly sweet, like the refrain of a love-song repeated over and over again. It was the falling of pearls into the silver cup of silence. Delicate, vague, full of meaning and majesty, it came from all parts of the horizon.

Only those who have heard these lovely mountain songs on lonely heights, their ears rid of the noise of men, their hearts free from everything that is not divine, know how truly moving they are.

That is why the soul of Nyerro did not heed the call of the mountain, but he rejoiced that the herd was very near. He finally reached the top of the pass. The Pas de la Casa, a gigantic silver fortress with a little green pool at its base, was fully visible. Facing it, not far away on the horizon, the black Pessons stood like

sentries. Toward Andorra the landscape was hemmed in by a line of spurs, rocky or wooded, of different heights. At the foot of these heights the Valira twisted in and out.

The slope which led toward France, bare, sunburned, and encrusted with bits of slate, beneath the quivering hot air seemed clad in silver. Far below lay a soft fleece of green pastures. The pathway of the exile was full of grace and promise.

On Nyerro's left the dust and the noise increased. Driven by the dogs, the immense herd was moving on.

Suddenly the first mules appeared, bounding, black, in a halo of golden dust. As they halted an instant on the crest to look at the traveller, their tall, nervous silhouettes stood out against the sky. Then they rushed down like an inky torrent. Neither dogs nor shepherd were to be seen. It was not a herd passing by, but a free troop of wild horses galloping across a primeval landscape to the rhythm of virgin waters and eternal winds.

The immensity of the horizon at this

height left the air free to follow its whims. Nothing stopped it in its mad course. The dust stirred by the herd whirled in all directions, and spread like the smoke of a volcano.

Nyerro, grown calmer, was watching the mules.

"Ourdillo," he called suddenly. The animal went on its way, and he realized he had made a mistake.

"Where can the équassé be?" he said in a loud voice, putting down the little bag of salt which, despite his distress of mind, he had remembered to bring with him. "Ourdillo and Castagné will have a feast!"

At the barking of a dog he raised his head. The shepherd finally appeared.

"Hurry up, caramba!" cried Nyerro. "I want to see my mules and get to Hospitalet early."

The man approached without hurrying in the least. He was short, thin, bushy-haired, and rather clean, for there had been nothing but dust to soil him. He was ill at ease and did not look Nyerro in the eye.

"Give me a light, Xiriball," he said. "I haven't had any matches for two days. I shall see that it doesn't happen again. I could hardly wait for a smoke."

"But what about my mules?" asked Nyerro, feeling in his pockets. "Are they all right?"

"There is Castagné, over there in front of the dog."

"And where is Ourdillo?"

"Well, well! So you are going to France? So you have taken up smuggling."

"Tell me where Ourdillo is."

"That's a big pack you've got on your shoulders," the équassé continued, jerking his head toward the bundle of clothes Nyerro was carrying.

The traveller lost his temper.

"There are no cigars in it, and I want to see Ourdillo. What's more, I want you to know I haven't any time to joke."

"Come," said the man solemnly, walking away. Nyerro followed him. His heart stood still. "Is she . . . Is she dead?"

The équassé made a vague gesture.

"Did you let the bears get her?" cried Nyerro, pale with wrath.

"I'm never so much afraid of the bears as of the mountain," answered the herdsman. "You know very well that half a dozen mules get killed every year. It isn't my fault. I've done my best. Come, you will see."

They walked silently toward a ravine from which rose a bluish mist. The herdsman's dog came after them, humble and sad, for he understood they were going to see the animal whom his vigilance should have saved. As for Mourillo, frightened by the kicks his master gave him whenever he drew near, he followed at a distance, his tail between his legs.

When he got to the edge of the ravine, Nyerro leaned over. A stone rolled down from under his foot and two vultures flew away.

"She must be dead," observed the shepherd, "if those creatures are around."

And behold, a black, motionless mass, splotched with red, as motionless as the

rocks on which it lay. The lifeless head, thrown back, was washed by the green waters.

"Did it . . . Did it happen long ago?" stammered Nyerro.

For the death of one of his mules, which he had truly loved, took on a tragic meaning for him.

"It was yesterday. I did everything I could, but I was alone and her back was broken."

The shepherd paused, surprised. Far from railing against him, Nyerro strolled away without uttering a sound. The équassé called after him, "Don't forget to tell Joan Xiriball that I did the best I could."

Nyerro walked on aimlessly. The voice of the équassé seemed to awaken him. "Don't forget to tell Joan Xiriball . . ."

How strange that sounded! So it was not apparent that he was leaving the country forever, that he would never speak to his father again. If Ourdillo had lived, he might have come back every summer at

pasturing time to this safe, solitary place. He could have seen once more the herds of la Solana and he could have explained to the shepherd that to earn more money he had settled in France, in Ariège, to work on the trans-Pyrenean railroad. His decision would have seemed quite natural, since he was not the héreu of the Xiriball family, but a poor, penniless Conco. But now Ourdillo was dead. Next year he would have to get acquainted with a new mule, strange and perhaps hostile. No, no, he could not come back under such conditions. On the other hand, exile seemed to him unendurable without this yearly consolation. He instinctively turned back toward Andorra. A moment before at every step he had felt he was tearing himself away from his native land. Now he was relieved. Death, the garrote? Or before that, the atrocious "prison of the aygua," a miserable structure built over a pool, in which the prisoner awaits sentence up to his waist in water. Nights and days in the icy water, a long-drawn-out agony? Perhaps. But of the two kinds of

torture the unhappy wretch chose the more remote.

Almost running, he went down over the pass again. It was nearly six o'clock when he reached the village of Soldeu. He did not stop. So great was his weariness that he seemed to have a dual personality. Like one who walks in his sleep, his thought was released from his heavy flesh. For the first time he conceived of a horizon beyond that of gold, of gross pleasure. Die, why not? But not till his time came. Then eternal sleep would be welcome, if it were not preceded by terror. He vaguely understood that his suicide would be more certain to save the Xiriballs from dishonor than his flight. When no game is left, the hunters return home. This thought left him indifferent, for there was no love in his heart. He was haunted by a vague feeling that justice demanded he should die the same death as Cisquo: the abyss, the horrible contact with rocks that tear the flesh, the blood the earth drinks up, the great cold of the night added to the great cold of death,

silence . . . stupor . . . life brutally mown down.

Justice, justice, naught but justice!

Turning over such thoughts in his mind, he reached the highest point of the perilous path that lies between Canillo and Encamp, and was about to stop at the place which had attracted his attention in the morning when la Beppa appeared before him, a bundle on her back, a bent silhouette, deformed, limping, a gnome or spectre in the twilight.

Nyerro looked upon her with wild eyes. She thought them the eyes of passion, uttered an inarticulate cry, spat upon the ground, and raised her stick.

Nyerro stared at her, but did not seem to see her. Since the death of her children, she had become a woman without age. Her hair was now white, her face weather-beaten, wrinkled. She appeared to crouch over her sorrow. Already she was toothless. Her lips were sunken and a pouch of flabby flesh hung from her protruding chin. Only her cheeks were still smooth, between the

deep furrows that framed her mouth and the wrinkles about her eyes.

To flee from her solitude, she travelled over the mountain roads begging. As long as she could walk she told the Comu she would earn her bread.

So, her knotty stick still raised, she passed by, watching the man as she went. There was between them an absurd and tragic misunderstanding. Both were equally far from any thought of love, she who was bound to death through her four children, he through his longing for death, newly sprung like a hideous mushroom from the decay of his soul. That is why Nyerro let her pass without taking notice of her. Reassured and yet puzzled, she left him and sank down behind a bush.

With the instinct of a wild animal, she divined that something unusual was going to take place. It could not be without reason that this wicked man was standing motionless in such a lonely spot. He was no more capable than la Beppa of poetic reveries before a landscape dipped in twilight.

Surely this Nyerro had some evil design. That was also the impression of Mourillo, who began to whine softly when he saw his master standing at the edge of the ravine. He even dared to pull him back by the bottom of his coat. An angry "Get away!" was his only reply. Mourillo drew back a little and sat down. With shining nose lifted toward the green sky, he began to howl dismally. Around these three wild creatures, the plaintive dog, Nyerro, and la Beppa, the mountain night coming from the depths below was heaping up its blue masses, layer upon layer, like a fantastic castle rising before their eyes. One by one the rocks, the powerful framework of the mountains, the cubical russet hamlets, melted into darkness beneath the heartless serenity of the rosy summits.

The green waters were becoming invisible. The white waters lay upon the rocks like shrouds. Far below, the Valira was roaring loudly like a wild beast that has returned to its den, for it could no longer be seen.

Nyerro, who was staring into the abyss with fresh terror, tried in vain to distinguish the outlines of his tomb. Suddenly he crouched, then sprang forward, his arms outstretched, and leapt, followed by the faithful dog.

If la Beppa had not been deaf, she would have heard, when the body rebounded from the rocks, the unexpected cry of this soul in distress, "Our Lady of Méritxell, have mercy." Bending over the abyss like a bird of prey, la Beppa watched Nyerro fall, then fled in the direction of Andorra.

With incoherent gestures and terrible guttural cries, her eyes full of frenzy, she went to announce to the Xiriballs — to them alone, to them alone — the death of Nyerro.

XV

THE AXE ABOVE THE ABYSS

JOAN said to himself: "I am an unhappy man."

He was all unconscious of the secret heroism of his own life. He was an unhappy man because his two sons — the one full of the promise of youth, the other full of hatred — lay beneath the sod.

The more remote became the tragic death of Nyerro, the more Joan was inclined to forget his crime and to pity and love him. Feeling that he had accomplished his own task, he longed to join those dead brothers who had been enemies. He longed to pacify them by clasping them to his heart. But life still had a strong hold upon Joan, as the ivy has a hold upon the crumbling wall.

The weary man envied the soldier who can seek death in the thick of the fight. As for him, he could only await his appointed hour. He could hope for nothing else. Joan felt safe in the perilous paths of the moun-

tain, for he had conquered them in his earliest youth.

Neither the place nor the time of avalanches could surprise him. First as shepherd, then as mule-driver, he had learned how to tell the solid rocks from the slate that gives way beneath the foot. He understood the treacherous waters that slumber within their granite cup.

Joan kept repeating: "I am an unfortunate man. It is not even given me to die, now that my task is done."

In the mean time he was growing old — very old — as do all those whose burden of sorrows is heavier than that of their years. Now it was almost always Anton who discussed with Angelo the work of the day. One morning they decided to repair the roof of a shed which was falling in.

"It needs a new beam," said Anton Xiriball, "and a strong one at that. I wonder where we can find a tall enough tree. So much wood has been cut about Andorra . . ."

"There is always the Ayguevive pine!" suggested Angelo.

"Woe betide him who touches it!" exclaimed his mother. "You know very well a man once died there for no other reason than that he had ventured to strike it with his axe."

Anton merely shrugged his shoulders:

"Everybody knows that man slipped and fell. He had only to tie a rope about his body. I knew him. He was a great boaster, and he had made a bet. A man with a rope around his waist would run no risk."

The pine, a hundred years or so old, grew at the very entrance of the gorges of Saint Anthony, about a quarter of an hour's walk from the village of Andorra. To put it out of the reach of men, Nature had charged the mountain wind to drop a seed upon the summit of a steep mass of bluish stone, corroded at its base by a powerful stream. Its collapse was a question of years. Undermined as it was, it jutted out like an iron prow, whose symbolic carven image was the pine. Sometimes as the morning mist floated over the mountain, the tree and the cliff emerged from it like a sombre ship with black sails.

Too high for the eye to distinguish the wild tossing of its branches in the wind, this pine, for whose possession a man had died, had the immobility of things eternal. The mountaineers admired it, but bore it ill-will for being so inaccessible. He who conquered it would arouse no jealousy. Moreover, in Andorra if the valleys are private property, the mountain-side — including the pasture lands — belongs to the community.

It was therefore quite allowable for the Xiriballs to covet the Ayguevive pine.

"Tie the rope about my waist and I will go and get it," said Angelo.

Old Anton and Maria protested on the ground that Angelo was not strong enough and was not used to handling an axe. As for Joan, he let the others have their say, looking at his son calmly. When they had discussed the matter thoroughly, he announced, rising:

"I myself shall go up there to-morrow morning. My father and Angelo shall hold the rope."

While Anton nodded his head in satisfac-

tion, Angelo objected strenuously, and Maria, to ease her conscience, proposed that they hire some one.

From the doorway Joan rejoined:

"If there is real danger, we have not the right to hire an outsider, and if there is none, it is not worth while. I can do it as well as another."

He was right, as he always was on the rare occasions when he made his will known. They all had to agree.

That night Joan Xiriball reflected upon the perils of the mountain, not without a certain bitter enjoyment. Was he, like his son, flesh of his flesh, to know the horror of the swift fall, of the breaking of bones upon the rocks, of the final rebound of the half-conscious body?

At break of day they were all three at work. Anton and Angelo, on the summit of the rocky ridge that ran up from the cliff, were holding the end of the rope by means of which Joan had slid down.

Having removed his coat, the woodcutter wound the rope around his waist and ex-

amined the pine, whose heavy black branches filled the narrow space.

Before attacking the trunk, he must cut off the branches up to a certain height. But he would preserve as many of them as possible to protect the tree as it fell far below.

So, armed with an axe, Joan made his way into the glaucous shade that the old tree kept imprisoned beneath its boughs. The trunk appeared before him, conical and roseate, its deep furrows thick with rosin. In all directions the branches rose, then fell gently with their own weight, like oars upon the sea.

Roundabout it lay a soft thick carpet of dry needles that crackled and snapped beneath the feet. Close to the rock against which the bottom branches leaned and swayed, Joan discovered the skeleton of an izard with its long, narrow skull and little horns. He reflected . . .

"This animal has found here a peace he was not seeking. Having fallen from above, he vainly strove to escape; the mountain

kept him imprisoned. But I who long for rest, I have a sure footing and a rope holds me back."

He worked on, invisible in his dark cage. Anton and Angelo followed the progress of this formidable undertaking from the branches thrown into the abyss one by one. Then the muffled blows of the axe became more regular. It was evident that Joan was now attacking the denuded trunk.

Old Anton, wholly reassured, said to the anxious Angelo:

"Give him more rope when he pulls it. You are hampering his movements. Don't worry; he is sure-footed."

It is true that Joan was sure-footed, but before each blow as he leaned back and swung his axe over his shoulder, he felt the irresistible fascination of the abyss.

An enemy, multiple, gigantic, and invisible, like the octopus lurking deep in the sea, seemed to lay hold of him and draw him down, when fatigue had made him dizzy. When he tried to strike the tree on the side toward the mountain, he could scarcely

swing his axe without hitting the rock. Joan realized that, if nothing unforeseen occurred, he would finish his task before evening, for a broad and livid gash yawned in the rose-colored trunk. Toward ten o'clock he pulled at the rope and was hoisted that he might eat his lunch.

Old Anton was smoking peacefully.

Angelo greeted his father with a joyful cry.

"Let me go down in your place," he begged. "Let us share the work. I am stronger than you."

"Very likely you are. That is why it is better for you to hold the rope. With you I feel safe."

Angelo pleaded in vain. Under the mid-day sun which seemed fairly to liquefy the slate, Joan took up his axe again. It was plain that the mountain would have none of him. No doubt it was content with two Xiriballs, youths with long lives before them. It had no use for an old man. He no longer felt dizzy, not even when he bent backward and flung his axe over his shoul-

der before each blow. The mule-drivers far below saw the silhouette of a man swinging back and forth with the regularity of a pendulum. Agile as an acrobat, he was now fearlessly playing with the axe above the abyss. The tree was about to confess itself conquered; its muffled groans announced its defeat. A few more blows . . .

Joan's foot slipped. As he fell, his breast and his chin scraped against the rocks, and suddenly he felt the weight of his unsupported body above the void. The thick dust raised by his fall blinded him; he tried to rub his eyes and smooched himself with blood; on his left hand was a long gash.

"Ohé! Pull on the rope!" he cried. Yet he was calm, for in the midst of danger he thought of the deep peace of death. From on high the two men were slowly hauling him up. He heard the agonized voice of Angelo.

"I am all right!" cried Joan, who had regained his footing. "I shall have done in a moment."

Then, gray with dust, red with blood, his white hair bristling with pine-needles and moss, he dealt the final blows.

When the severed trunk was held by only a few fibres, Joan wrapped about it a second rope he had brought. He then slipped this rope behind a rock that jutted out from the platform in the direction of the slope, tied the other end around his waist, and called to his companions to hoist him up.

He had already forgotten his wounds. Angelo's exclamation reminded him of them.

"It is nothing, my boy!" he declared. "I don't even feel it. But if it hadn't been for the rope, all would have been over with me."

"How calmly you say that," murmured the young man.

Without answering — for what was there to say? — Joan handed him the end of the rope which was attached to the pine. Thanks to the projecting rock, he hoped that they could pull the tree up toward the slope.

One behind the other the three men harnessed themselves as if to tow a boat.

Way below in the gorge red-capped mule-drivers were watching the struggle of these three pigmies with the giant. Agonized convulsions shook the pine, like Prometheus, writhing under the relentless beak of the vulture, yet silent.

"Let go!" cried Joan.

Held back by the thick branches, the tree fell slowly, an immense black mass in a cloud of glittering dust. It might have been the fall from high heaven of some accursed archangel. With a triumphant expression in his eyes, old Anton remarked:

"It took a Xiriball to overthrow him, the old brigand."

"See how your hand is bleeding, father!" exclaimed Angelo. "The last pull made it worse; let us go home quickly."

"Maria will pour boiling oil on it," said his grandfather. "That heals wounds in short order. Let us go."

He was happy and proud of their exploit, and he could hardly wait to relate in

the village the tale of the death of the pine.

That he might not alarm Conchita, Joan allowed his son to tie a handkerchief around his hand and washed his face. But at the sight of him Maria shrieked and called together the whole household.

"Be silent, and boil some oil," commanded Anton. "What an uproar over a very small thing!"

"My father-in-law is right," Maria explained to the trembling Conchita. "There is nothing like boiling oil. If this upsets you, child, go upstairs. I can get on very well by myself."

"Yes, do go upstairs," Joan said gently.

He remained alone with his wife. But Conchita's last born lay in his cradle near the window. Just as Maria was making ready to apply her terrible remedy, the child awoke and began to cry.

"What a pity!" grumbled Maria Xiriball. "Conchita will be sure to hear him and will come downstairs."

"No," said Joan; "I will rock him. Bring the oil over by the window."

He drew up a chair, sat down, and while the boiling oil sizzled and steamed on his wound, scarcely changed color. He smiled at his grandchild and rocked the cradle.

XVI

THE RISE OF THE XIRIBALLS

"PRAY accept, Xiriball. We shall be honored."

Five or six notables of the country were gathered at la Solana. In Andorra these notables play an important part. When the bailiff finds himself obliged to make a decision in a difficult case, it is not unusual for him to seek the counsel of certain elderly and experienced citizens. Who could know and interpret custom better than the old people of the valleys?

And it was the notables who, realizing that the election of consuls was at hand, had come to advise Joan to enter the lists. The death of Nyerro had put a stop to rumor, and the bailiff had been only too glad to leave in peace this family so full of honor. It mattered little whether Nyerro's death had been accidental or intentional. The guilty man, supposing that Nyerro was

guilty, was now dead. This being so, they had thought Joan might be elected consul. These elections are very peaceful, although there are two contending parties, the one French and the other emanating from the Bishop. Any Andorran who has reached the age of thirty and is neither servant, invalid, nor drunkard, is eligible, provided he has sufficient property to make good losses resulting from bad management, if the occasion arises.

The choice of Joan was eminently suitable. In addition to his financial standing and his honorable past, he had the further advantage of being on friendly terms with both the French and the Spanish provost.

"You will be elected despite yourself," said one of the notables, "and you cannot well refuse to hold office since you are not yet sixty years of age."

All those present laughed at this friendly remark, and Joan himself smiled. Thus far he had listened without replying, looking the speaker straight in the eye so as to be

sure to catch everything he said; but now he lowered his head and his look became vague and dreamy. He finally said:

"I cannot accept."

The notables exchanged glances. No doubt Xiriball was alluding to the accidental death of Nyerro. Did he feel that he could not enter public life until the time of mourning was past?

"We know you are in mourning, Xiriball. Your son died in the mountain . . ."

"My two sons," interrupted Joan. His voice barely betrayed his emotion. Keeping his eyes on the floor, he went on: "But I have another son left; take him in my stead; he will fill the place very well."

This possibility had already passed through the minds of the notables. Angelo, although less beloved than his father because he was more envied, enjoyed the respect of all. It was chiefly out of deference that they had come to Joan first. The essential thing was that this influential family should be represented on the Council.

The eldest of the notables, a spare old

man with a large nose and sharp eyes, expressed what was in the minds of all.

"We are sorry you will not consider the nomination, Xiriball, but your son will have our friendly support."

"Wait for him. He will come in very soon. Are you there, Conchita?"

The young woman's step was heard on the stair. She appeared, her youngest, a fourth boy, in her arms. She had grown into a rather heavy woman, large-hipped and short-necked. Her ankles were no longer slender, but if she concealed them it was out of modesty and not vanity. Her fresh face, framed in its black braids, was still beautiful. It would have seemed very young despite her mature body but for the look of melancholy which lingered in her eyes. Respected, beloved, protected, absorbed by home duties, she was still very reserved with the people of the village, who called her proud.

She signed her name, as is the custom among the pubillas, Concepcion y Asnurri, and her sons were called Xiriball y Asnurri.

She did not complain of her lot. Having married without love, she was constantly surprised that she found flowers to gather all along her path. Since she had expected nothing of Angelo, she was not exacting, and accepted gratefully everything that came to her. Angelo, absorbed in his work and the teaching of his sons, and Maria, rather superficial and easily contented, believed that Conchita was perfectly happy. Joan alone was worried by the shadow that lay in the depths of her eyes. "Is she always thinking of the past?" he wondered with a sad foreboding in his heart.

Although undemonstrative, he loved his daughter-in-law. She loved him, too, in her own way; that is, by bringing up her sons to love and respect their grandfather.

As for Anton, still robust and able to enjoy life, he found in Conchita a deferential daughter-in-law: that was all he asked. The lands which made up her dowry interested him far more than did she herself.

When she appeared, Joan said to her:

"Will you give us something to drink, or

will you call Maria who is in the courtyard?"

"I will serve you myself," she said, laying the child in his grandfather's arms.

That was her way of showing her affection for Joan. Often in the course of the day she left her last-born with him, although she was usually a jealous and overcautious mother.

"You would think," grumbled Maria, "that Conchita trusted no one to hold her children but her father-in-law."

The wine, the sugar, and the water were being mixed in the glasses when Angelo appeared, surrounded by his three boys. He wore the old Andorran costume, a small jacket, a high red belt and a red waistcoat, short blue breeches and gaiters, and on his head the red barettina. It was indeed strange, said the people roundabout, for him to dress in this way when he was so rich. Only a few clear-sighted folk understood the deep significance of it. He wished in every way to prevent the old Andorra from dying.

Angelo, less laconic than the rest of the family, often used to say: "Give us as many roads as you please, but let us remain Andorran."

The beauty of Angelo Xiriball was famous even in this country where beauty is so often met on the street and in the cottages of the poor. The typical Andorran possesses such regular features, so frank a look, such an inherently noble carriage, so supple and muscular a body, that the traveller is tempted to coin the phrase, "Beautiful as an Andorran."

Angelo added to physical beauty that which comes from an active mind and a lofty soul. He might be envied, but he had no enemies. His fellow citizens were proud of him and felt confident they would one day see him wearing the long cloak and the three-cornered hat of the "Illustrious Council of the Valleys." This would not please the envious, but it would nevertheless redound to the honor of them all. When the notables rose to go, Angelo had accepted. He extended his hand, hardened by

the handle of the plough, yet, as his mother remarked with pride, skilled in writing.

During the days that followed, she kept saying to Conchita and to Joan:

"Some time he will be a member of the Illustrious Council and, perhaps, who knows, Bishop's provost. His Grace is very well disposed toward him."

In anticipation of these distant and glorious possibilities, they beautified the house. New slate roofs, new shutters, new plaster within gave it a holiday appearance; only Conchita's seriousness and Joan's premature old age seemed out of harmony.

"I don't know of what stuff Joan is made," observed old Anton, who had never really loved his son, "but he has grown old sooner than I."

Conchita, who had heard him, replied with the sharp, cold tone that sometimes crept into her voice — it was like an underground stream beating upon an invisible rock before coming to the light:

"It is because his shoulders have borne too many burdens."

Anton stared at her uncomprehendingly and was silent. What did it matter to him? Did not the harvest promise to be magnificent?

A brief illness which came upon Joan at about this time did not trouble his father in the least. Every one falls sick sooner or later. It really wasn't worth while to call the doctor.

But Conchita went for the doctor and learned from him that Joan could not survive another attack.

"The lungs are affected," he said, "and the heart as well. See to it that your patient doesn't have pleurisy again."

From that time forth Conchita sought the company of Joan more and more. No one but she knew the nature of his illness and that he was going to die.

She alone knew that this strong family would have gone under but for him. But if she had said so, who would have believed her? From the beginning Joan had never been rated at his true worth by his family. He had been slow at his books; in school he

had never gratified the vain pride of Anton. Later in life he had left all the authority to his father and all the honors to his son.

He had not wished to play the part of the captain who issues imperative orders from the bridge, but that of the obscure and unknown man who pumps the water from the constantly filling hold of the ship. Such situations as this are less rare than one might think. Many a family owes its continued existence, its honor even, to the obscure, unknown man in the hold. . . .

At times it may be a wife, a mother, a sister, who humbly sacrifices herself.

Joan felt sufficiently rewarded by the love of Angelo and Conchita. He was too sensitive and affectionate himself not to divine all that lay beneath the reserve of his daughter-in-law. Since she had been seeking out his society, their eyes had often met, only to turn away again. Joan flattered himself that he was hiding from Conchita the shadow that was coming into his, while he felt that Conchita was striving to conceal from him some haunting thought.

What thought? That of Cisquo? But what could she be awaiting from the dead of long ago? Or was it . . .?

It sometimes happens that the man in the hold, when he thinks he is going to enjoy a little rest, has occasion to observe: "I believed my task was done, but behold the water is making its way in again."

"I am going to die," thought Joan. "I shall not be here to save them. Why doesn't she speak?"

After all, they were alike, for both were simple, large-hearted, and persecuted by life. With both of them silence proceeded from the same cause. They had so many things to say, things so fathomless, so much greater than they themselves, that, powerless to put them into words, they held their peace.

Meanwhile the devout soul of Joan gave voice to sentences like these, which Conchita cherished faithfully:

"I have builded my house upon a firm foundation . . ."

One thought that obsessed him took the form of the admonition:

"Think not of the past unless it be to safeguard the future."

His eyes, resting upon the son of his son, he expressed his secret satisfaction at having saved his race.

"They shall be full of honor . . ."

Conchita stored up these words. One day she said in the gentle tone she now used with him:

"I am going to the fields, for one of the harvesters is ill. Would you like to bring my little son at five o'clock?"

The eyes of Joan assented and thanked her. At the appointed hour he took the child, wrapped it in a shawl, and set forth from the village. As he passed by, old women talking idly before their doors mumbled:

"There goes the last of the Xiriballs in the arms of his grandfather. The poor man is old before his time and he is coming to be the servant of his daughter-in-law."

People spoke to him with a hint of commiseration in their voices, but he smiled upon the son of his son. The air was fresh,

though the sun was warm. In the shade the harvesters had to draw on their coats, but they perspired as they worked. That is the way with the mountain. From the great passionate creature it is we must expect extremes. So as they went along the sunny road, Joan took off the child's shawl. On his left the mountain scaled the radiant blue, to the right, far below, the lands of the Xiriballs stretched down to the Valira their fields of rye and of tobacco, their meadows of luminous green fringed with little willows. On all sides the waters droned like a beehive in the sun. Joan drank in the air with keen enjoyment. He felt better, he no longer coughed, and his heart beat regularly.

Suddenly the child began to prattle·

"Ma . . . ma . . . ma!"

He marvelled at the intelligence of his little grandson, who had recognized his mother among the harvesters.

Conchita, on her side, had felt that her child was near and ran up, her eyes soft and gleaming with pleasure.

Above the hedge of shining alders the grandfather held out the child, who shrieked for joy. Happiness seemed to float about this charming group. Abandoning their work, the harvesters looked on smiling.

And suddenly, as unexpected as lightning from out a starry sky, the blow fell and the soul of Joan was flooded with bitterness. Why, oh, why was Concepcion Xiriball so cruel? Had he not need of peace, he who was slipping down toward death?

She said heedlessly, perhaps urged on by some unknown force:

"I make you a great deal of work. What I need is a little servant of eleven or twelve to look after Cinto."

Then she lowered her eyes and took her child to her breast.

Making no reply, Joan thought sadly:

"My cup is overflowing; death is close at hand."

In the distance he heard the laughter of the harvesters and his son Angelo singing as he bound the sheaves.

XVII

THE LITTLE SERVANT

FOR some days the nameless little girl hidden in her asylum was a menace to this strong family.

Joan knew that Conchita was a passionately devoted mother, and was, moreover, obstinate. She cared for but few things, but to those few she clung. Since her marriage, only twice had she exercised her will; but on those two occasions every one had been obliged to bend before it. When the third time came, they would have to yield again.

Take this child into their home, call up the past, shatter the peace of the household, lose the respect of the village! Crime and hatred had led a less redoubtable attack upon them than this maternal love. Joan was discovering to his sorrow that families, like individuals, have their own maladies, their own secret adversaries; that there is no certainty of their enduring, and that their delicate organism can resist the blows

of fate only if the will and far-sightedness of a leader wards them off.

Now it happened that the chief of the Xiriballs was not the haughty grandfather, nor the brilliant young heir, but the most unassuming among them, and the weakest, because of the kindliness of his heart.

That racial vigor, that heart of bronze that old Anton had inherited from his dead, Joan had had to seek through patient effort. Although victorious over himself, he was physically exhausted. He avoided Conchita and she avoided him. Then pity laid hold of them both. Conchita pitied this head of the family; he pitied this mother of sorrows.

The little servant . . .

After all, why not? It was a clever ruse. Aside from Maria, whose lips would be sealed by family pride, who would ever suspect the truth? Joan's stupefaction and resentment little by little gave way to gentler feelings. At times he grew tender as he called up a vision of that unknown child, the daughter of his eldest.

Like all the just in the evening of life, as

he drew near the grave he drew near to Goodness. Her radiant figure stood in the dark doorway and illuminated it. Up to that time full of honor and of equity, but careful to conceal his feelings, Joan told himself that he had at last earned the right to show affection. He felt that justice is wrought by men while goodness comes from God.

For Joan, the happiness of others replaced the daily bread of which he now partook sparingly. The ingenuous pride of old Anton, the dignified pride of Angelo, Maria's satisfaction, the laughter of the children, gave him strength to live on.

The only thing lacking was the happiness of Conchita. Why did she set such a price upon it?

One day, when he was serenely talking of death, she said to him:

"That is why I spoke of *her*. I wanted your permission, father!"

And, indeed, she might have waited, she might have let the little girl in through the door left open behind his coffin. She had not been willing to deceive him beyond the

grave. She was straightforward and she loved him . . .

From force of habit, he hid his emotion in silence, and Conchita disappointed, resumed her air of obstinacy.

At about this time, in the early days of autumn, Angelo was elected consul and a festive repast was offered the notables and friends of the Xiriballs. Maria and Conchita served them; out of deference to custom, they did not sit down at the table themselves, but helped the women who had been hired.

The children were playing in the court yard; as for the small Cinto, he slept through the dinner; then his brothers took him out and left him playing before the door of la Solana. Conchita was serving the coffee when cries were heard. The young woman dashed out and came back carrying the child whose forehead was bleeding.

"He has hurt himself badly," said the mother, "but I can't be in more than one place at a time."

Several voices arose.

"It is nothing at all!"

"Put a cobweb on it!"

"A little salt!"

"Just wash it off!"

Maria was bustling about, muttering to herself.

Suddenly a slow, gentle voice was heard:

"My daughter-in-law has too much to do. She should have a young servant to look after the children."

And they all agreed with Joan. Nevertheless, the project would soon have been forgotten had not Conchita taken pains to make her fatigue evident. Anton was too selfish to give any thought to the suggestion. But Angelo said: "Why don't you try to find a little servant?"

It was Joan who answered one evening toward the beginning of winter, after a day of fever and labored breathing:

"I myself will go fetch an orphan from la Séo. That would be better than taking some one nearer home."

He had spoken with lowered head, warming himself by the hearth. Suddenly he had

the impression that a light fell upon his face. The fire was not burning more brightly than usual, no new lamp had been lit. Whence came this warmth and brightness?

Joan raised his head in surprise; it was Conchita looking at him.

When the neighbor brought the Sagrada Famílla, Conchita felt herself flush with emotion. That evening, as on the night of the tempest when Cisquo had been brought home, a watch-light burned at la Solana before the holy images.

Only now the night was mild and the radiance of the stars seemed to have slipped into the purified heart of Conchita.

The unknown little girl was coming to dwell near her unknown mother.

There would be between them, on the one hand, the persistent silence which duty demanded; on the other, the timidity befitting little servants.

But they would breathe the same air, they would eat bread grown in the same fields. Later, when she came to die, Con-

chita would be able to give her blessing to all her children.

Joan had gone off with a neighbor in a carefully closed tartane. Since no one but Conchita believed he was seriously ill, they had let him set out in the cold December weather.

As Conchita brought him his tapaboquès and an extra covering, he said to her:

"I am doing this out of love of you. Will you promise not to betray your emotion?" And she had sworn upon the heads of her children to conceal her emotion and to combat her love.

But how difficult it was! As the hour when the tartane would return drew near, Conchita grew nervous, agitated, and impatient with her older children. She busied herself with the pious attentions due the Sagrada Famillia. She lit the watch-lamp and prayed within her soul.

"Our Father, I am following the impulse of my heart, and the priest has told me that I am doing right. Bless this house; bless my children; bless the little servant . . .

"Grant that this word may come to my lips and not the tender name I should like to give her! Grant that I may not listen to the call of my heart, and that the last days of my father may be happy! Help me, Holy Madonna, and, in the name of my past sorrow and my present humiliation, forgive my sin: my sin now so remote that it seems but a dream . . . I have forgotten Cisquo, but the child lives within my heart. Holy Virgin, deign to be for the little servant who is to come the mother I cannot be . . ."

She prayed so fervently that she heard nothing until the cries of her children running down the village street announced the return of Joan. Feeling herself grow pale, she rubbed her cheeks, clenched her teeth, and went down the stairs.

The family, gathered for the evening meal, was waiting the arrival of the little stranger. Conchita had reached the threshold of the room when Joan appeared in the outer doorway all bent with his fever. He was pushing before him a child with downcast eyes, a child whose body was twelve

years old and whose face seemed to be fifteen. She wore a dark blue cloak, wooden shoes, and a muffler about her throat; in a fold of her cloak she was awkwardly hiding her hands, red with cold. A thin knot of hair, far beyond her years, adorned the neck of this little girl. Her black felt hat cast a heavy shade over her half-closed eyes. Every one thought, "How ugly she is!" But Conchita, in ecstasy, sang from the depths of her soul, "My daughter is tall and beautiful." And she started toward the child so impulsively, such joy shone in her eyes, that Joan was alarmed.

"Conchita," he said.

She looked at him . . .

A miracle was taking place in the doorway. This trembling frail old man drew himself up; his head, bent of late, now dominated the family and in his sad eyes lightning flashed. Joan Xiriball was unrecognizable.

Even in the full strength of his youth he had not been like this. Suddenly the obscure man in the hold became the captain.

The truth was that never, perhaps, had the house of Xiriball been in such peril.

"Conchita," repeated Joan, laying the hand of a master on the shoulder of the child, "here is the little servant you wanted. She is called Coloma."

He added, stern and grave: "Her mother is dead."

Upstairs under the eaves, but just over her own room, Conchita had had a little corner fitted up; partitions separated it from the great attic; she had painted light blue the plaster of these partitions. This gave the little attic room the look of a chapel; nothing was lacking but the stars and the Virgin. So Conchita enthroned the Virgin on a chest, but she did not dare to scatter stars about. They would have betrayed her love! There was an old rug at the foot of the little iron bed on which lay an enormous red down-puff, on the wall hung a wooden rosary and above it a spray of boxwood which the priest had blessed. The rosary had belonged to the mother of Conchita as had a blue-and-gold vase she

set before the Virgin with its nosegay of paper roses.

That evening the little servant wept in her lonely room, for she missed the company of the other orphans and the motherly kiss of the Sisters. Her mistress, Madame Xiriball, had left her with a very gentle good-night, it is true, but she had not kissed her. Coloma wept and fell asleep. It was Christmas Eve, but the village lay in its accustomed quiet. In these austere regions, once wild, covered with thick forests and resounding with the howling of wolves, midnight mass was unknown.

To betake themselves to church people waited the peaceful dawn. The little servant was therefore awakened very early by Madame Xiriball who asked her if she would like to hear the "misa del gall."

Coloma timidly assented and arose. Though she went to church with the Xiriballs, no one took her by the hand, but she was happy to feel the comforting warmth of the shawl in which Madame Xiriball had wrapped her. With frightened eyes she

looked up at the gigantic walls that hemmed in the village on all sides, very black in the livid morning light. To her sensitive lungs the air was harsh as unripe fruit upon the lips.

"Are you all right, little girl?" asked Madame Xiriball from time to time.

Coloma nodded, but she was not really a her ease until she found herself within the warm, brightly lighted church. Holy Mother, how richly were you clad and how beautiful was the little child whom the priest held out to be kissed by the faithful!

While, one after the other, they went forward to adore the new-born babe, naïve songs filled the air to the lively accompaniment of castanets, for tradition demands that this joyous sound that beats the rhythm of the dances of Spain shall be heard that morning in honor of the Divine Child. In ecstasy the little servant prayed fervent prayers and Conchita heard in her own heart the heavenly laugh of happiness.

Her treatment of the child was such that Joan soon felt completely reassured. His

daughter-in-law would never betray her secret. "I can die," thought Joan. But the happiness roundabout him was the bread of life and gave him strength. He went through the winter without another ill turn.

Anton remarked: "My son is one of those people who are always dying and live to bury everybody else!"

One Sunday after high mass, which Joan attended faithfully, the bailiff offered at auction a piece of land he had had to seize. The bidders were few. The well-to-do already possessed more land than they could cultivate; the small owners had not the ready money. Only two voices were heard bidding.

Suddenly that of Joan Xiriball sounded out:

"I will take it at seven hundred pesetas!"

This caused great surprise. Had not those Xiriballs sufficient fields? Must they needs own the whole country? Yet, whatever the feelings of the bystanders, the land went to Joan.

"If you like," said the bailiff, "you can take possession of it next Saturday. I shall be there at nine o'clock."

"I shall be there, too," was Joan's reply.

Instead of going back to la Solana, he beckoned to his son whom the purchase had filled with astonishment and walked along with him in the direction of Santa Coloma.

"Let us go see the field!" he said.

Despite his respect for his father, Angelo observed: "We didn't need it. We find it hard enough to cultivate the lands we already possess."

Joan shook his head. "You do not need it, it is true, nor do I; indeed, I shall very soon be content with far less; but listen to me, Angelo. There is something more important in this life than reason; there is justice. The idea of buying had never occurred to me until the land was put up for sale. We have taken from la Séo a little servant who for small recompense gives us all her time. When your sons are grown, if you no longer need her, what will become of her?"

"She can marry," said Angelo.

"I hope so. But she will marry much more readily if she possesses a little of God's earth."

With that Joan stopped, dropped his head, raised it again, as he regained control of his voice, and spoke once more in a firm tone:

"Will you promise some day to give the little servant this land that I have bought and that I am going to leave to you?"

And as Angelo looked at him in surprise, he went on:

"I am about to die, and the approach of death makes us kinder, Angelo. We feel pity for every one; for the poor above all, for not only have they to face death, but much misery as well."

"You are going to die? You, father?" exclaimed Angelo who had heard nothing but this terrible sentence — "but you are . . ."

He stopped, for with a simple gesture Joan forbade him to utter a falsehood. "No, I am not better, and I am older than my

father. May the will of God be done! Ah, here is the field; what do you think of it?"

Angelo was not deceived by this change of subject. But he obeyed his father.

The land destined for the little servant, instead of lying to the left of the road, where a gentle slope clad in rye and clover leads down to the Valira, stretched up the rocky hill close to the Puig d'Anclar; it wound in and out among the steep rocks, lay at their feet, flowed along like slow-moving water, made its own way, and displayed its thick wheat amidst the weeds of neglect.

The high rampart of the Puig protected it from the north winds; to the east it was distinguished by a clump of oaks; along the greater part of its capricious outline, the mountain raised a natural wall of rocks abloom with iris.

Reddish and everywhere shut in, the earth was like thick wine in the depths of a giant cup.

Everything about this land marked it off from the neighboring fields; it had a strange

personality; no human power could have added to it or divided it.

"We can grow tobacco here," said Angelo.

On the way back he added: "You shall have your will, father, and this shall be the dowry of the little servant."

That evening Joan Xiriball suffered a heart attack from which he declared himself recovered three days later. He was anxious not to miss his rendezvous with the bailiff. The formalities which were to take place there, these time-honored rites inherited from ancient Rome, are in Andorra equivalent to legal acts and replace them. Joan Xiriball would not be the actual owner of his field until the bailiff had poured a little earth into his hand that he might scatter it over the surface of his newly acquired property.

EPILOGUE

SO that April Saturday Joan Xiriball arose and dressed, breathing with difficulty. Maria and Anton, who disapproved this purchase of land, set out for the fields. Angelo was due at a meeting of the Council, but, because of the alarming condition of his father, expressed a desire to stay away.

Joan dissuaded him, saying:

"I shall take Conchita and your sons. It will be a good thing for them to be present. Go along, my boy. I shall return."

That April morning was to winter what flowering apple trees are to the snow; the light and glistening whiteness of the frost floated rather than lay upon the grassy stretches; it was like a soft breath blown over the earth.

The swelling buds of the bushes were encased in crystal, the air was sonorous with crackling sounds, the roadway creaked beneath the steps of passers-by. The birds soaring from out the wild-rose bushes

seemed to break and scatter strings of pearls. Everything shone, but softly, for the sun was still concealed by a white dome with a golden sheen. The roofs of the village were black, delicately powdered with white, and the smoke was very blue. This world of white awaited the sun which, as its prison opened, tinted in rose now one summit, now another. At times a single ray, flashing like the sword of an archangel, pierced the heart of a foaming cascade, and made of it against the blue granite a twisted column of purple and gold.

At times, too, a flood of light awoke and brought to life some pasture land where black goats were grazing beneath the eyes of a daring mountain shepherd. All this play of light, all these sublime and lovely scenes hung high in the heavens, thousands of feet above the roofs of the village.

Accustomed to such spectacles, neither Conchita nor her sons noticed the beauty of them. But Joan gravely greeted the light.

As a river nearing the end of its course

sings more songs and reflects more passing clouds, Joan found upon his lips new words to paint the broader vision of life that was now his, thanks to death.

"On the whole," he said to Conchita, "life is very simple; duty is no harder a road than any other — quite the contrary! Viewed from close at hand, it is a rather pleasant path, if you are willing to follow it. But for the Xiriballs everything suddenly grew complicated. I was not the man needed to save the family. I was not very intelligent, so I had to make a great effort, Conchita; that is why I am going a little before my time.

"No, let the children stay near me. Let them listen to me. They will understand later. They must learn that men can die contentedly. That will help them to live when they are unhappy. But if they don't go far from home they will never be very unhappy. The trees that never stir are happier than the animals; they do not hurt one another. Each one of them is always at home, and the good sun shines on all. I

have never stirred, Conchita, but I have been an oak smitten by lightning. That rarely happens. Our children must not fear that. Our family is strong and it will be strong for a long time if you bring your children up aright . . . in the love of the land . . . in the fear of God.

"My boy, go see if the bailiff has come."

Frightened, Conchita tried in vain to lead Joan away.

"We will return to-morrow," she promised.

In the midst of suffering he smiled with kindly irony.

"Then you don't care whether the little servant has a dowry, my daughter?"

In the mean time the bailiff, accompanied by his assistant and a scribe, came up with the breathless child.

Conchita went forward to meet them. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears.

"Make haste," she begged; "he has not long to live and it is cold here."

"The sun is coming out," said the bailiff,

to conceal beneath commonplace words the emotion the sight of this dying old man aroused in him.

And in truth the sun rending the mist fell like a benediction upon the field of the little servant. The earth showed red amidst tangled dog grass, the green lace of dandelions topped by yellow stars, and clumps of lucern run wild. The swarming of the ants, the golden flight of the first bees, the fluttering of early butterflies, blue as periwinkles, animated its immovable surface. As the bailiff bent over, the eyes of Joan were fixed upon these manifold details.

Did he see them? Perhaps, for he was thinking only of the land. On the threshold of death, he was not concerned with his destiny in the beyond; he had too deep a faith in the justice of God. He would go to the place prepared for him as the still water of the lakes, drunk up by the sun, rises to the blue heavens. No, he felt no anxiety for his own soul; but he was going to abandon his people to the storms of life. Must he not show them a safe refuge, the land that

holds, nourishes, and leads to the peace of evening those who are pure of heart?

He was henceforth sure of Angelo and Conchita. But their children? Was it not fitting to give them a last lesson, to make them understand the value of this precious earth?

The bailiff rose. Joan Xiriball held out his hand.

"Support him, my children!" said Conchita, weeping.

They obeyed.

The golden light of morning made a halo about the white head of the dying man as, leaning upon the sons of his son, he scattered a handful of earth to the winds.

THE END

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